# That DINNER at BARDOLPH'S

R. A. J. WALLING

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*By* R. A. J. WALLING

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# PROLOGUE

## The Sweet Little Cherub

# Prologue

As a lawyer I have to admit that there is no evidence for the existence of Dibdin's Sweet Little Cherub, nevertheless, I believe in him. One has to postulate him to explain things. Without him, happenings which seem perfectly pointless when they happen and persons who seem negligible would not so often take on their subsequent importance.

Madame Almeida, for example, and my visit to her villa.

I have seen Madame Almeida exactly twice. The first time in a ludicrous scene to which only *opéra-bouffe* could do justice. The second time—but I shall be describing that when I tell the story of Jim Edderley's adventure presently.

My first encounter with the Senhora Maria Adelina d'Almeida seemed a comic interlude in the life of an Englishman who, except for a certain four years of necessary belligerence, had been essentially a peaceable and unadventurous person. It bore no relation to his past, and apparently could have no influence in his future.

I had been wandering about Europe on a lazy holiday, and had drifted into the City of Lisbon. Cantlick always says that Lisbon is precisely the place where one might expect a comic opera to come true. I confess, however, that I had not

found Lisbon comic, but tragic—mournful and yet very lovable—a great city, with more than the great city's normal contrast of magnificence and squalor. A pathetic people striving after fine public ideals and forever pulled up in the road for lack of money, intensely patriotic and forever the victims of politics.

These busy folks, who slaved all day and danced and sang and talked—but chiefly talked—all night, and appeared never to go to bed, were immensely proud of their red and white city and their unparalleled harbor, and of Henry the Navigator, and of Vasco da Gama, and of Camoëns—as they well might be. But they left off the contemplation of their ancient glory and the pursuit of their present profit every now and then to have a Revolution.

A Revolution occurred while I was staying at the big hotel in the Praça do Dom Pedro—the Rocio Square.

It was a rather tame affair. The Avenida da Libertad is the Champs Elysées of Lisbon, and it has a resemblance of the original model in that one finds a kind of étoile at the top of the hill where several streets meet. The General who ran this Revolution had seized upon the étoile as his strategic center and mounted a number of light guns in a circle commanding all the streets. He was not called upon to let them off: the Government which he proposed to depose did not wait for him. It removed itself to a warship in the Tagus. The population of Lisbon looked on

with a rather bored expression: it was *vieux jeu*.

Apparently only one man in all Lisbon thought it worth while to get excited about the Revolution, and the Little Cherub ordained that he should come my way.

I had a two-seater car which had taken me all over Europe without suffering any injury until it rattled its outraged interior to scrap-iron on the amazing roads of the Lisbon district. One of the consequences of the revolution habit is that it never gives you any time to do road-making. They told me nobody had touched a road in the neighborhood of Lisbon since 1914.

When news of the *coup d'état* reached the hotel, I got out the little car and drove by a side-route to the region of the étoile. I found a quiet backwater near the bull-ring, and was about to walk to the scene of operations when I heard some shouting and a little man came full pelt round the corner and collided with me just as I dismounted. He shoved me unceremoniously back into the car and got in beside me, shouting: *"Vae! Vae!"*

He was trembling all over, as I thought with fear, but really with rage, as I afterwards learned.

A crowd of youngsters, with two or three gray-uniformed soldiers among them, came running after him. As they hove in sight he squeezed himself down on to the floor out of sight, and urged me on again—*"Vae! Vae!"*

I did not want a rabble about the car, so I

trod on the starter and moved off. The little man cared nothing about the direction of my going so long as I went. I steered away from the étoile and down the broad road towards the country. The mob had missed him and spread out to examine the precincts of the bull-ring. In a minute we were out of hearing in the quiet dusk.

Then the little man rose and hailed me as his savior, and made flowery speeches, all the time urging me not to relent in my course. We put a couple of miles between ourselves and the Revolution. The little man sighed and signed to me to stop.

"Where would you like to go?" said I in my best Portuguese, which was not very good.

"Oh!" said he, in excellent English, "you are an Englishman, Senhor! What luck!"

He added that I had saved a patriot from his enemies, that he had rashly ventured to say a word or two in favor of the Government and to condemn the conduct of the revolutionary General, who was well-known to him (and no better than he ought to be), with the result that they had sought to kill him; and I, the Heaven-sent Englishman, who was always to be found where most needed, had saved his life.

He attempted to kiss me. I drew the line there.

Judging by the torrent of eloquence which the little man poured over me, I concluded that his "word or two" was a euphemism, and that prob-

ably the explanation of the conduct of the crowd could be found in the little man's flashing tongue and encyclopedic vocabulary of scorn.

I told him I was glad to have been of use to him, and that if he liked I would drive him to any place of safety he mentioned.

He tried to fall on my neck again, but, seeing my aversion, contented himself with a request that he might be driven to Cascaës. There he would endeavor to tell me all his profound admiration for myself and the English race.

I knew Cascaës—a pleasant place just beyond the mouth of the Tagus. We worked round to the north of the city by the vilest roads on earth, and out towards the sea, my companion directing me. So in the darkness of a perfect summer night I drew in at the gorgeous gateway of the Villa Almeida outside Cascaës. When the car stopped, the little man leaped out and banged and bolted and barred the tall iron gates, then slapped himself upon the chest, and cried:

"Welcome, Senhor, to my poor house. Will you come in and permit me to present you to my wife?"

The "poor house" was one of those small palaces in stone and stucco which rise in great numbers among the palms and cactus hedges around Lisbon. A vast house, but so highly decorated that not a foot of room was left where another decoration could be stuck on. In the middle of it was a fountain in a patio roofed with glass. To this apartment the little man led me with a

flourish, switched on a hundred electric lights, turned taps and made the waters play, rang a bell which brought a manservant hurrying, commanded him to say that a distinguished visitor would wait on the Senhora, ordered wine: the little man buzzed like a trembler on an electric coil. He left me breathless.

Finally, I was taken to a salon to be introduced to his wife.

"The Senhora Maria Adelina d'Almeida," he flourished. "The English Senhor who has saved my life from the fury of a bloodthirsty *canalla*."

I could hardly keep my countenance as the little man—gray-haired, sallow-faced, black-eyed, as I now saw—danced about while he led me to a divan where sat an enormous lady: a mountainous lady. She could have eaten Senhor Almeida and seemed hardly any bigger. He could have danced from Cascaës to Lisbon while she was getting up from her sofa. But she had a pleasant face and a pleasant voice.

"Oh, my Armando!" she cried. "And is it true? I have heard on the telephone that—but you are safe, and the Senhor has saved you." She held out her hand to me with the back upwards, and to enter into the play, I kissed it.

"Senhor," she said, "you have rescued from danger the one man who can save his country from the vermin who destroy it. Command us henceforth!—and our children also."

This atmosphere of heroics was not easy to breathe, and I tried hard to make an end of my

visit to the Villa Almeida. I did not get away for two mortal hours. I had to eat a banquet, to hear a great deal about Portuguese politics, to admire the two Almeida children who were sent for to see the hero but for whom their father would have been either a corpse or prisoner (so they put it)—and I finished by acquiring an amused liking for the mountainous woman of whom conspiracy and mystery and political adventure were the daily nutriment. I felt certain that she had never enjoyed anything more in her life than this. When I did tear myself away, she said to me:

"Remember, Senhor Allison, that if ever you are in any danger and our fortunes or our lives can serve you—call for Maria d'Almeida, and she will come!"

Of course, this was pure rhetoric, since the Senhora could with difficulty walk across her own drawing-room. But I did remember it, and the day came when this seemingly futile farce was most useful to me in an emergency.

And then, for another example, my sister Margaret. . . .

When she married Wilby and he took her off to Hull, I thought she had sacrificed everything worth living for except a husband. I told her she had better say good-by, for I would certainly never go to Hull to see her. Hull, indeed!

"All right, Sam," she replied. "But you never know."

Which was perfectly true, at any rate for me:

I did not know. I remembered that later on when I went to Hull in a desperate hurry.

And, once again, there was Cantlick. . . .

Cantlick and I were such close friends that he took license to abuse me how he would. He insisted that certain opinions of mine were "justy Bolshy," and that they were due chiefly to my irresponsible bachelordom. "Get a wife, Alliskivitch; that's what you want."

"I've never seen the woman I could marry," I would answer; "and if I did she wouldn't marry me."

"Oh, you never know," Cantlick would retort. "There's a girl for every man and a few over."

The memory of Cantlick's repeated prophecy, which I had regarded with complete skepticism, pricked me one night—one wonderful night. It was the rarest performance of the Sweet Little Cherub. . . .

But now, to the story of Bardolph's dinner-party and what came of it.

# PART I

# The Dinner Party

# Chapter One

EDWARD BARDOLPH had been making a great noise in the world for a year or two.

But for Cantlick, it would have remained for me as indifferent as the roar of the traffic in the street, or the screech of a locomotive whistle, or the clucking of a hen. Somebody is always making a noise like Bardolph for a season and then becoming silent. The world is none the better for them and their vociferations, and perhaps not much the worse.

I have often dabbled idly in the theory that there is a certain aggregate of happiness and misery in the world, and that we can only influence its distribution and no more vary it in quality and quantity than we can add cubits to our stature. But this is not to be a disquisition. The thought recurred to me in speculation upon the meaning of Bardolph's existence. He certainly affected the distribution of happiness and misery. But in himself he was insignificant. Not only did he bring nothing into the world and take nothing out of it, but he created nothing while he was in it, and left nothing behind. He meant nothing. He did nothing. He was nullity.

Yet for a year or two Bardolph commanded more of the good things of the material world

than Midas ever had. He was more flatulently toadied and lick-spittled than Queen Elizabeth. People abased themselves before him. They crawled. Bardolph had done nothing to enhance the wealth or the beauty or the usefulness of life. He was less important to mankind than the scavenger of the streets or the cleaner of the sewers. Much less. Yet they crawled. The ancient aristocracy of England crawled—some of it. The free and independent and enlightened Press crawled—some of it. The City and Law. The race-course and the Senate. All crawled. Bardolph had millions.

How he got his millions nobody seemed clearly to know. Nobody seemed to care. He had them.

Bardolph never made millions. He had not brains enough to make a paper boat. The best letter he could write would have earned him a stiff imposition in an elementary school. He was a futile parasite. And he was less beautiful than the woolly aphis on an apple tree. An ugly man —a paunchy, bloated man of forty, with a double chin, a gross neck which bulged in rolls of shiny cuticle over his collar, a bald head and little ratty eyes. But he had millions. And they crawled.

This deleterious object had a suite of offices in Gracechurch Street, inhabited by his secretary, Arnold Mellon, and a large staff of clerks, who did not crawl more abjectly than his neighbors in Park Street and his fellow financiers in the City

who had fewer millions, and his colleagues at Westminster, and his constituents in the Woodbury Division, and the villagers of Woodbury. They all crawled at the feet of this cheap, common, offensive man. He had millions.

To me, Bardolph would have been of less consequence than the slug I trapped with a handful of lime around my begonias if it had not been for Cantlick and the fact that Cantlick unfortunately came into the orbit of Bardolph. I was very fond of Dick Cantlick. I had been at school with him. I had watched his growing fortunes with delight. He was in the East India trade and slaved at it. I had been best man at his wedding. He made me godfather of his little daughter. He laughed at my theories of trade and commerce and finance, and said bookworms were incompetent to judge anything but the taste of paper and ink. But no two men could have been more intimate or have a greater liking for each other than Cantlick and I.

It was on a night when I stayed with Cantlick, as I often did, that Bardolph became for me something more than an irrelevant and disgusting noise. True, he was a near neighbor of mine at Woodbury, but we had never met, and I had always avoided places and occasions where we might have met. Cantlick lived at the other end of the county, near Byfleet, and it was a curious chance that I should have gone as far away from Woodbury as one could get in Surrey to make touch with the lord of Woodbury.

Mrs. Cantlick had left us to our pipes in Cantlick's den and gone to bed. He had talked out his golf and gossip. Suddenly, Cantlick said:

"Bardolph's a neighbor of yours now that he's bought the Woodbury place. Ever see him?"

"No," said I; "mushroom millionaires have no allurements for me."

"Extraordinary man," said Cantlick.

"To judge by what I hear of him," I answered, "he's an ill-conditioned and objectionable swine."

"All the same, an extraordinary man," Cantlick persisted.

"Well, I admit that ordinary men are not swinish, if that will satisfy you."

But it did not satisfy him.

"Look here, Allison," said he, "you let your theories about wealth run away with you. Bardolph is not a gentleman. But he must have some qualities. A man of no quality could not make millions."

"It doesn't require any human quality to make millions," said I. "Only a brutish disregard for other people's rights and interests, a thoroughpaced dishonesty, a simian astuteness, a face of brass, a heart of lead—"

"And a wooden leg and false arms," Cantlick mocked. "Come now, old Bolshy, let not your angry passions rise."

"I'm neither angry nor passionate," said I. "Contempt—that's what I feel when you talk to me of Bardolph. And why do you talk of Bar-

dolph, anyhow? What's he to Cantlick or Cantlick to him?"

The question was unanswered for a moment while Cantlick puffed thoughtfully at his pipe, with his eyes on the fire.

"I've been thrown in touch with Bardolph lately. I'm likely to see more of him," he said at length. "I can't quite make him up. I wish you'd met him. We could compare impressions."

"I'd as lief meet a boa-constrictor. By Jove, Cantlick, that's it! A boa-constrictor. I change the metaphor. I drop the swine. I adopt the boa-constrictor. Bardolph and his kind are boa-constrictors. They glitter, fascinate, squelch, and swallow their victims whole."

Cantlick made no reply to this diatribe. He smoked diligently.

"All the same, Allison, I would like you to meet Bardolph. He's lunching with me at the Bishopsgate Club to-morrow. Come, too. Test your theories by observation. I should like it very much. I want it. It may be important to me."

I stared my astonishment. Why on earth should it be important for Cantlick to have any opinion I could form about Bardolph at a luncheon party? I was going to say I hated lunching in the City. Something in Cantlick's look gave me pause. A suspicion flashed.

"Oh, very well," said I, "if you make a point of it."

That was how I became acquainted with Bar-

dolph and formed the judgment I have always held of him. While I sat opposite to him at Cantlick's luncheon-table, I had in the back of my mind all the time the alarming thought that had come suddenly to me the night before. I kept alert for any symptoms in the relations of Cantlick and Bardolph that might confirm or dispel it.

I had felt diffident about putting the direct question to Cantlick himself. I might easily have said to him, while we were at our confidential ease: "Look here, Cantlick, have you been silly ass enough to tangle yourself up in the toils of this dirty financier? Have you risked your fortune to him? Have you staked the comfort of your wife and the future of my little god-daughter on this creature's honesty and good faith?"

But on this subject I was not easy with Cantlick. I knew nothing about finance. I had only my unreasoning but overwhelming instinct of aversion from Bardolph and all that he represented. Cantlick, who was a good business man, made fun of what he called my Bolshy theories. In fact, I had no theories at all. Certainly I was not Bolshy. I simply knew in my bones that Bardolphism was all wrong.

The man himself proved quite as hateful as my mental picture of him. A brainless boor. But even craftier than I had thought. His little ratty eyes never ceased to search me from the moment when Cantlick introduced us. He had

strong instincts, too. Instinctively he disliked me and put himself on guard. Amazing as it may seem, I have sometimes thought that Bardolph had not up to that time met many people who were completely indifferent to his millions, or at least declined to pay some sort of formal homage to them. He bristled.

Cantlick's luncheon-party consequently did not serve my purpose. I had no opportunity of studying the relations between the two, because Bardolph occupied himself entirely with me. Some tentacle of him was bruised. He felt hostility. He was on his defense.

I must not give the impression that it was an uncomfortable or disputatious party. In the sedate quietude of the Club it was a perfectly normal and dignified party. Bardolph had no fund of general ideas outside the money market and the Stock Exchange, and I knew little about either. So the talk was all gossip. But even gossip gets a subtle flavor from the psychological state of the gossipers, and the latent antagonism between me and Bardolph was apparent to Cantlick. He discounted it on my part because of my "views," but was surprised that Bardolph responded to it.

Only one passage in the talk had any bearing on the things that happened afterwards. That was when Bardolph made familiar mention of Lord Iscaster. Bardolph trailed behind him a string of titled persons, long and impressive. It contained a good many decent names. But I

was frankly staggered to find Lord Iscaster's among them. He appeared to be a director of some Mexican concern that Bardolph had "taken up." Possibly I put my surprise rather rudely.

"I suppose it isn't necessary for the guinea-pig to know how its hutch is made," said I, "but Lord Iscaster could hardly know less than he does about—what is it?—sausage skins, or something."

"No, sir," said Bardolph, "it is not sausage skins. As Lord Iscaster is a particular friend of mine, I should prefer that you did not call him a guinea-pig."

That was the nearest point to a dispute that we reached. Of course, I apologized profusely for ill-timed facetiousness about a friend of Mr. Bardolph's.

If the association of Lord Iscaster with one of Bardolph's bubbles was strange, the financier's indignant assertion of personal friendship with Lord Iscaster was stranger.

Though I had never met Lord Iscaster, I knew enough of him to suppose that he would be about the last man in England to have confidential relations with a person of Bardolph's type. The Darleys were an old and a proud family. They had all the faults of antiquity and pride that leap to the eye—a certain arrogance and impatience of lesser people. But nobody would have numbered among those faults complaisance towards the vulgarity and chicanery of the Bardolphian world. They had been barons in Devonshire

since time immemorial, occasionally great figures at Court, and less frequently in Parliament.

Their characteristics were specially familiar to me because of my acquaintance with Colonel Darley, Lord Iscaster's brother. Jim Edderley and I had been subalterns in his regiment during a certain period that we all agreed never to mention. We had learned to like the man in him as much as we respected the soldier. Colonel Darley was fond of me in a colonelish way. For Jim Edderley, he developed an affection almost fatherly. I had heard something about an attachment between Edderley and Lord Iscaster's daughter, Katherine Darley, whose slave the Colonel was. All these things contributed to the astonishment I felt when Bardolph dragged the name of Iscaster into that gossip at the Bishopsgate Club.

When Cantlick asked me, afterwards, for my impressions of Bardolph in the flesh, I could no more than repeat what I had said before. He seemed to me to be among the most detestable of God's creatures. I advised Cantlick not to feed with him too often, on the principle that he who sups with the devil needs a long spoon.

# Chapter Two

Not long after the luncheon-party at the Bishopsgate Club, I was reminded of Bardolph by a surprise visit Jim Edderley paid to me at Woodbury.

Edderley had taken up after the war the threads of his practice at the Bar, snipped in 1914, and had done better than a good many men who left the Inns of Court that year. I, being a little older, and feeling the strain of four years' fighting a little more, gave up the struggle, and the Temple knew me no more. I had gone down to Woodbury to live on my tiny possessions and ruminate. Some of the ruminations found their way through the point of my pen and ultimately into the pages of minor reviews. But that was quite unimportant, and it has nothing to do with this story.

I met Edderley in London infrequently, but always with pleasure. We talked two kinds of shop, legal and military, and refreshed our soldierly friendship; but there had been no constant intimacy.

It was a surprise, therefore, when Edderley came upon me one afternoon in my garden, saying he was staying at Woodbury Manor over the week-end and thought he would look me up.

"Good Lord!" I cried. "What on earth are you doing in that galley?"

"Oh, a little tennis and a little bridge," said Edderley. He was not frank. Clearly, something other than tennis and bridge had brought him to Woodbury. I hated the thought of what it might be. First Cantlick, then Edderley. The toils of the financial octopus coiled disgustingly.

I must have shown in the first five minutes of our talk my detestation of Bardolph and my disapproval of Edderley's presence at Woodbury Manor. Edderley looked at me quizzically as he parried my questions. At last he said:

"Come out of your tub, Diogenes! A solitary life does not encourage the sense of humor."

I declined to see anything funny in the spectacle of a decent man eating the food and using the house of Bardolph.

But Edderley, it seemed, was simply bent on spoiling the Egyptian. He defended this revolting theory with a twinkling eye. It was some time before I got a real inkling of the truth.

"Do you know anything about Bardolph?" I asked him.

"Not much, my dear Allison, and that much not to his credit. I think he's a perfectly appalling swine, not fit to associate with human beings, and as there's a human being at Woodbury Manor just now in whom I happen to be specially interested, I'm there to prevent Bardolph, as far as I can, from associating with her."

And then it all came out.

Bardolph was entertaining a party to meet Lord Iscaster and the Hon. Katherine Darley, and as Colonel Darley was of the party, Edderley had got him to secure an invitation.

The impression that Edderley was in love with Katherine Darley had been a mere vagueness in my mind. Now he told me how far the affair had gone.

"Katherine and I knew each other in Devonshire—just neighbors and sporting companions. When we got back from over there, Allison, she was one of the reigning belles and I fell in head over ears. She liked me, too. Everything was going on perfectly till this thing Bardolph came on the scene. Now it isn't. It's skidding."

"What can Bardolph have to do with Miss Katherine Darley?" I asked. "How the devil did they ever get into one room together?"

"Her father," said Edderley tersely. "Old Iscaster. There's the deuce and all to pay in the family."

Then I recalled what I had heard from Bardolph himself. I told Edderley of the passage between us at Cantlick's luncheon-party.

"Bardolph," said Edderley, "mentioned your name to-day. I pricked up my ears, of course. He had gathered from Cantlick that you were a limb of the law. He wanted to know all about you. Terrific curiosity. Somehow I thought he showed a certain hostility towards you. That made me curious. So I came along, Allison, to

compare notes about the financial wizard of the age."

I had no notes of any value to give him. My knowledge of Bardolph was confined to what I had read about him in the newspapers and the single interview of an hour in Cantlick's company. The rest was prejudice against the Bardolphian tribe.

"You must have made the prejudice pretty plain in the short time you had," said Edderley, "for Bardolph positively dislikes you."

"I should have been deeply insulted by any other sentiment," said I.

"Well, Allison, do you think you can stuff your prejudices in your pocket and keep them there for a few days? Take a lawyer's view? Put up with Bardolph for my sake and give me a hand in a devilish awkward business?"

Edderley bent over from his chair and looked earnestly at me.

"Do you want me to meet Bardolph and pretend?" I asked. "What's the object?"

"My object is to prevent a tragedy, Allison. Katherine Darley and I are for each other—irrevocably. Old Iscaster was not averse until he got mixed up with Bardolph. Of course, I was not a *parti*. I have a little money and some prospects. He knew all about me, being a neighbor. My people were his friends; as I told you, Katherine and I had a children's friendship. So Iscaster looked on at our love-making with—

what shall I say?—tacit approval? We were as good as engaged: I wanted to make a bit sure of my practice—that was all. Everything went according to Cocker till Bardolph got hold of Iscaster and turned him into a guinea-pig. Iscaster is an expensive sort of man. He never had much money and his estates are, or were, half in the pawnshop. But he managed to scrape a living out of them; in fact, to do himself very well. Then, enter Bardolph. Iscaster, like an old fool, is only too willing to believe that hitherto he has missed his vocation and that all these years a Heaven-sent financier has been lost to the world. Bardolph feeds his vanity. To cut it short, I am no longer good enough to enter the Darley family. No struggling lawyers for my Lord Iscaster. I have been given the office as plainly as he could give it without kicking me down the steps. Jim Edderley is all right as an acquaintance and a platonic friend. But he must no longer flatter himself that Katherine Darley is for him."

Edderley made holes in the gravel with his stick.

"Of course," said I, "there's worse than this, Edderley."

He looked steadily at me for a moment.

"Of course, yes. Iscaster means Katherine to become Mrs. Bardolph."

I nodded.

"But," he went on, "Iscaster's an ass. Katherine would drown herself first."

"No," said I. "I don't think so. She would run away with Jim Edderley first."

"Look here, Allison!" he cried. "Are you playing a game with me? Have you seen Katherine?"

"Never saw her in my life," I answered. "And as for games—it's you who are trying to play a game with me. Coming here and circumlocuting. Why couldn't you say: 'Look here, Allison! Miss Darley and I are going to do a bolt under Iscaster's nose, and we want you to help'?"

"I wish I could have said it. Unfortunately—no such joss. First thing I said to Katherine. But for some reason or other, she jibs. Has the extraordinary taste to be rather devoted to the old man."

"But a girl's devotion to her father is not going to determine a question like this, Edderley. There's something else— Well! If Bardolph asks me, I'll go. He can't ask me to stay; it's only next door, so to speak. It'll be dinner, no doubt."

"Probably—he has a big dinner-party for Friday. And Friday"—he hesitated—"Friday may be a crucial day."

I looked curiously at him.

"Why crucial?"

"Oh, I don't know. I have a sort of feeling. I'd like you to be on hand. I scent things happening."

"You're very mysterious," I said.

Edderley dug his stick deeply into the gravel.

"If a certain thing which I sense should take place, Allison, I should not stick at much where Mr. Bardolph was concerned."

"If," said I, "there was a worm under the gravel just there, you'd kill him, Edderley."

He pulled up his stick and looked at the ferrule.

"Why—I suppose I should," he said.

# Chapter Three

As I told Edderley, I had never seen Katherine Darley. She was rather outside my world. One forms a mental preconception of a person known only at second hand. My preconception of Katherine Darley had been drawn from casual words of her uncle and odd allusions by Edderley himself. Knowing that she was daughter and heiress of an ancient house, I conceived her as a tall, distinguished girl, not, perhaps, haughty, but conscious of her aristocratic lineage with a little native sense of superiority and a pleasant and inoffensive condescension to humbler folk. This picture was so clearly imprinted on my mind that, if I had been an artist, I could have added her to the gallery of Darleys.

Then, the day after Edderley's visit to me, I met her—or, rather, Edderley brought her along to my cottage. Of course, my portrait was absurd.

My man Fenstock came to the study where I was writing and said: "Mr. Edderley and Miss Katherine Darley, sir. I've shown them into the sitting-room. Shall I—?"

"Yes, bring them here, Fenstock," said I. The sitting-room was a hole. I never sat in it, nor anybody else. There was one room fit for feed-

ing in and one for work, and they occupied all the south side of the house.

So my first vision of Katherine Darley came as Fenstock opened the door and stood aside and she framed herself in the doorway, with the sun rays filtered through my curtains lighting her up, and the vague shadow of the passage as a background.

No wonder Edderley was prepared to do many things for her or that she was the darling of Colonel Darley. As unlike my picture of the tall, willowy, condescending aristocrat as a girl could be: under middle height—she was about five feet three—slim and almost puerile in figure. Edderley, coming in immediately, literally loomed over her, and he was not a very big man. She wore the short hair and the tight-fitting hat, like a basin upside down, that was the mode just then, and her dress was one of those variegated garments imitating Joseph's coat-of-many-colors without the sleeves. I could not describe it more closely, for the reason that it suited her exactly and seemed part of her. It was herself that mattered. She simply leaped into a man's heart.

I have never met a man who, having seen Katherine Darley, did not fall in love with her. And I fell, at the instant of that luminous vision in my study doorway.

She had good features—a broad brow, serious brown eyes, and a clear dark complexion with a tint of olive. Not her good looks—they were hardly exceptional—but a certain radiance fas-

cinated me as it fascinated all who saw her. She seemed too luminous to be quite true.

She came forward as I sprang back from my writing-table, and Edderley introduced us, apologizing for disturbing a literary person in the throes of composition. I pushed my papers aside to show that they did not matter, gave her a seat, rang for Fenstock and told him to order tea, and fussed as a bachelor will. She looked on at my antics with delighted amusement while she produced the needful small talk—how Jim had told her all about me but was a bad hand at description, so that she had expected to find quite a different sort of person; how this was the first time she had invaded a real bachelor's holy of holies, and was quite sure that no bachelor with such a lovely room had any excuse for becoming a benedict; and thus and thus.

But all this—which was very delightful, since there was nothing on earth pleasanter than to hear Katherine Darley's soft firm voice and watch her animation—had nothing to do with the purpose of their visit. We reached that when Fenstock had taken away the tea-tray and we went out by the window and sat looking down over my little lawn.

"I've told Katherine about yesterday and what we said, Allison," Edderley began. "She is as grateful as I am for your promise to help. We are going to ask you to redeem it, but in a different way."

I looked at Edderley with curiosity. My

promise to help was merely an agreement to tolerate the society of Bardolph for a few hours in order that we might compare notes about him. I looked at the girl. My promise became an undertaking to do anything, however quixotic, she might require of me.

"Oh," said I; "so in spite of his interest in me, Mr. Bardolph does not want me at Woodbury Manor?"

"I don't know that," Edderley replied. "We haven't tested the point. You remember I said I had a sort of premonition that to-morrow night might be critical? Well, it's going to be. That's when we want your help. But not at Bardolph's."

"Where, then?"

"You said you had a habit of running now and then down to Eastbourne for a night and a day. Would it be possible for you, if we wished it, to telegraph now for a room at Eastbourne on Friday night?"

"No need," said I. "My room is always ready for me whenever I arrive."

"Good. Then, would it be possible for you to go down to Eastbourne on Friday night?"

"Nothing in the world to stop me," said I.

"Do you generally take your man?"

"Always," I answered. "I'm a lost soul without Fenstock."

"You drive down, don't you?" (I nodded.) "Is there room in the car for four?"

"Lashings of room," said I. "Big as an omnibus."

"Closed car?" asked Edderley.

"No—but an all-weather thing. You can close it up."

"Well, Allison, will you be at Wood End Gate —you know that—" (I nodded again) "at nine o'clock on Friday night, with the car closed, and wait till you hear from me?"

"Of course, Edderley," I answered. "I never refuse to give a friend a lift."

# Chapter Four

WHAT other talk passed that afternoon is nothing to the purpose. Katherine Darley wormed her way a little further into my susceptible bachelor heart by reason both of her own charm and of her manifest devotion to Edderley. They were such lovers that even a rather cynical, cross-grained lawyer, such as I, felt a fresh and fragrant breath of romance in their presence. To help them to elope seemed a perfectly natural thing: indeed, when I reflected that I was helping them to elope from Bardolph, and from Lord Iscaster, who was Bardolph's tool, the predestined and inevitable thing.

My introduction to Miss Darley was on the Tuesday afternoon. As I had told Edderley, I could always be sure of a room at the hotel at Eastbourne; there was no need to communicate there. But I called Fenstock and mentioned the journey to him. I told my housekeeper. I talked of it before the maid.

If I was going to take part in an elopement, it might as well be done in the classic style. But, doubtless, the track-covering was a little amateurish. I observed that Fenstock lifted his eyebrows higher than usual when I gave him three days' notice of a trip to Eastbourne, whereas my

usual practice was to call him in, tell him to throw some things in a bag, bring round the car, and set off in a quarter of an hour. However, there it was: it could never be said that I had invented Eastbourne on the spur of the moment to cloak a journey elsewhere.

On the Wednesday morning, I was a little startled to find Bardolph's name figuring big in the newspapers, not in its customary luminosity, but rather under a cloud. Bardolph's great concern, The Anglo-Iberian Corporation, was a merger of a great many companies in which Bardolph was interested—chiefly owning properties in Mexico—banks, silver mines, oil fields, land, and Heaven knows what. The Corporation was managed on the principle of the swings and the roundabouts. When silver was bad, oil was good, and when land hung fire the banks could always be relied upon to go bang. A vast concern had been well-conceived. The Anglo-Iberian Corporation had taken Bardolph to the top of the tree in the City.

And now, on the morning after Edderley's visit to me with Miss Darley, I read some curious news about the Corporation. A headline gaped: "Big Fall in Anglo-Iberians. Persistent Selling in America." According to the City Editors, the slump in the stock of the Corporation was not to be accounted for by any facts about its business. At that special moment banks were doing well, silver too, oil excellently, and land—well, land was about as good as could be expected in a coun-

try like Mexico. (And then, of course, a few hortatory words to the Mexicans about the need for a "stable Government.") So that the actual physical operations of the Corporation were prosperous and did not account for the lack of confidence undoubtedly felt on the American continent. They gave particulars of the sale of huge blocks of shares, pressed and forced in spite of the decline in price. They recorded that Anglo-Iberians had dropped on the previous day from £5.10 to £4.10 at the close, after having been as low as £4.5. They said the slump was probably only temporary, and that one of its interesting results had been to bring John K. Pillar into the market in support of the stock. The probable consequences of this intervention their readers would no doubt be able to predict.

One reader was quite unable to predict. I did not commonly read the City article, and a good deal of it was mere jargon to me. I had never heard of John K. Pillar, and hadn't the remotest notion why his intervention should produce any special consequences, or what those consequences might be; I put the whole thing down as a trick of Bardolph's for making more millions, and fully expected to read on the following day that Anglo-Iberian shares had jumped up to an unprecedented and fabulous height. Anyhow, however high they might mount, their soaring would not help Bardolph to get hold of Katherine Darley, for she was going to elope with Edderley, and I had a chief part in the conspiracy.

At this point I laughed at myself. I was actually looking forward to the adventure with joyful eagerness.

Fate, however, would not permit forgetfulness of Bardolph and Anglo-Iberians. That afternoon I had a telephone message from Cantlick. He was coming over to Woodbury to a dinner-party on Friday; he had a day or two to spare, and if I could give him room he would confer his company upon me that night and the following one. I told him it seemed a perfect plan, for I was quite free till Friday evening, when I intended to leave for Eastbourne. Not that it did not seem a shade strange for Cantlick to come to stay with me in preparation for his visit to Woodbury Manor. But I was always glad to see Cantlick, and particularly I wanted to know how deep he was in Anglo-Iberians, and how all this stir was affecting him.

Then Cantlick revealed, as soon as he arrived, that he had sought the visit specially to talk about Bardolph and Anglo-Iberians. He apologized for imposing himself on me: he was in need of the advice of a friendly man of the world. As we sat in my study that night, he told me a strange story.

"You know, Allison, I put a lot of money in Anglo-Iberians on the strength of Bardolph's unquestionable financial ability and the importance of the Corporation's properties. It's all real stuff, this. I know the facts."

"Then, why this slump?" I asked.

"That's the mystery. Somebody is bearing hard, persistently, and purposefully. The question is: how far will it go?"

"All Greek to me," said I. "But I have come to the conclusion that this is another dodge of Bardolph's for making some more money himself and leaving other people in the cart."

Cantlick smoked thoughtfully for some moments.

"Yes," he said, "it might be. Perhaps you're right. But I don't understand John K. Pillar coming in to hold up Anglo-Iberians. He was supposed to be at the back of a rival group."

"Who the devil is John K. Pillar? And how can anything he does matter a bean to you, Cantlick?"

Cantlick smiled indulgently.

"John K. Pillar is in Wall Street another such figure as Bardolph in the City. He sprang up just as suddenly—more suddenly, in fact; but he commands worlds of money. The curious thing is that the John K. Pillar companies are also Mexican. Surely you've heard of the maneuvers of the rival financial groups in Mexican politics?"

"My dear Cantlick," I said, with passion, "I know that the tentacles of these loathsome reptiles stretch everywhere to suck their nutriment out of corruption, and I have no doubt the suction is strong in a country like Mexico. But why in the name of fresh air don't you throw up all the beastly business? Sell whatever you have in

Bardolph's swindles for what you can get out of it, and live a decent, self-respecting—"

Cantlick interrupted the flood of my eloquence.

"Now then, Comrade Alliskivitch!" said he with a gesture, "save that up for the next Red Flag procession in Woodbury, or work it off on a magazine editor. I've done exactly what you suggest."

"What!" I cried. "What have you done?"

"Sold all my Anglo-Iberians."

"At a loss?"

"Yes. I'm five thousand out on the deal."

"Only that? Why, my dear Cantlick, splendid, splendid! Think of the five thousand as of a shilling put in the collection plate to expiate your sin in touching the Bardolphs and their like."

"What a pathetic ass you are, Allison!" he exclaimed. "Hang it, man—nobody can afford to go shedding thousands all over the pavement. I had great difficulty in deciding what to do—and I haven't told you half of it yet."

"If it's anything more about Stock Exchange gambling, take it as said, Cantlick, and let's talk about my god-daughter."

Cantlick took a turn or two up and down the room.

"Miss Mischief is all right," said he. "Only complaint, you don't come to see her enough. But look here, Allison, you aren't such a fool about affairs as you pretend. I wanted to consult

you on a very curious thing. Why do you think I sold my Iberians?"

"Why, I suppose," said I, "you saw the price falling and resolved to get out with as little loss as possible."

"Not at all. I had no intention whatever of getting out. I saw no reason for the slump, and don't see one now. It's a maneuver, but who's at the back of it? Whether Bardolph, as you suggest, or somebody else—I don't know. I figured it out thus. When the object of the bears had been accomplished, the shares would begin to go up again. They would probably rise higher than ever."

"Then why the devil did you sell at a loss?"

"Because I expect to be able to buy at a profit. On Monday morning I had this letter."

Cantlick fished out a pocket-book, selected a paper from it and handed it over to me. I unfolded it, a plain sheet of notepaper covered with this letter written in a bold hand:

RICHARD CANTLICK, ESQ.

*Dear Sir:*

I am quite unknown to you and propose to remain so. I have, however, a certain interest in persons who *are* known to you, and I desire that you should be forewarned of certain events.

If you will consult the price lists in Tuesday's papers you will find that Anglo-Iberian Corporation stock is falling. By Wednesday morning this movement will have become precipitous, and the stock will go down all the week until something like a panic has set in. On the

following Monday morning the price of Anglo-Iberians may be ten shillings, certainly not more than a pound.

On the Tuesday they will begin to improve, and before the settlement on Monday fortnight they will stand probably a little higher than at the present time. I need hardly say that this information is of the utmost value, and I desire that you should possess it in order to take any action you may think wise.

I cannot reveal the source of the information or my own identity, I will merely add that a similar letter has been addressed to Colonel Darley.

Yours faithfully,

A Holder of A. I. Stock.

I passed the letter back to Cantlick.

"Bardolph, of course," said I. "Another filthy trick for ruining a few hundred people and putting their money in his own pockets. He just lets a trickle through to you."

"You think so?" said Cantlick. "Can't say I do. The information so far has been remarkably accurate. I am told in the City that Bardolph is almost out of his mind about the slump. I doubt whether Bardolph has anything to do with it. But now, Allison, supposing this letter to be genuine and its prediction sound, I stand to make a fortune. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"What do you want of a fortune?" I asked. "And how can you make a fortune out of this?"

"As to the first part of the question, well, everybody wants a fortune—especially Miss Mischief. And as to the second, it's perfectly obvious that if I sell twenty thousand shares in

Anglo-Iberian to-morrow, when the price will probably be about three pounds, and if I buy them on Saturday at one pound, I stand to make £40,000. If I buy twenty thousand more on Saturday and sell them the week after at five pounds or more, I stand to make another £100,000 or so. Is that so?"

"I suppose it is, Cantlick," said I. "But if you do it, I'll never speak to you again."

"Why, Allison?"

"Because you'll be a damned thief, Cantlick, and I don't hold converse with thieves."

It was naturally difficult if not quite impossible to make Cantlick see my point of view. To him the changes and chances of the Stock Market were fair opportunities for the astute man or the man with "inside information" to do legitimate business and make meritorious profits. He could not understand that he was robbing somebody else as callously as if he picked his pocket.

But there was a little hesitation in his mind now. He was puzzled—but chiefly by his native suspicion of voluntary philanthropy in the Stock Markets. He had never known anybody to give away information after this fashion. He thought there must be a catch somewhere.

# Chapter Five

On Thursday Cantlick went up to Town for a few hours. Even then I could not escape the tyranny of Bardolph and Anglo-Iberians. I saw in the papers that the mysterious prophecy still held good. The shares went down at an increasing pace. They now stood at less than three.

Then Fenstock announced Coloned Darley just as I had settled down to work between tea and dinner. There was no work I would not put aside to talk to Colonel Darley; but I had a suspicion, which proved well-grounded, that he, too, had come to talk about Bardolph and Anglo-Iberians.

He began upon the subject, indeed, as soon as he decently could.

"Edderley told me I should find you here, Allison, and I wanted somebody to advise me about a strange and difficult matter."

I nodded. "I expect," said I, "it's the same thing I've been talking over with Cantlick, isn't it? You know Cantlick?"

"No, but I've heard of him once or twice at Company Meetings, and I expect to see him tomorrow at Bardolph's."

"Well, Cantlick has shown me an anonymous letter, whose writer says he has sent a like one

to you. You won't mind if I say I don't feel qualified to give any advice on the subject, Colonel?"

"No, I shan't mind. But you'll talk it over with me, Allison? I'm in a devil of a fix. I don't know what to do."

When Colonel Darley, whom I respected as much as any man on earth, spoke to me in that tone, there was only one thing to be done. I had to listen to his story and let him pose his dilemma.

On the advice of his brother, Iscaster, before he personally knew anything of Bardolph, he said he had invested a little money in Anglo-Iberians. It was not much, but then Colonel Darley had no superfluity of riches, and the loss of even a modest investment would be serious for him. Also, the little he had was intended for his niece Katherine, and he could not face the prospect of losing it.

"Why should you fear to lose it, sir?" I asked. "If this letter is genuine, it will be quite safe to hold on to your shares. Even if it isn't, Cantlick assures me that the concern is quite sound, and when this maneuver, whatever it means, is over, the stock will recover."

"I suppose that's so," said Colonel Darley. "But the fact is, Allison, I fear Bardolph. . . . I hate Bardolph! I curse the day when Iscaster persuaded me to put a penny in his infernal concerns. If that man is allowed to go on with what he has in mind now, Allison, he ought to

be shot! Yes—and I'd shoot him in his tracks myself, shoot him as a mad dog."

The Colonel spoke with intense feeling. His face was almost as white as his mustache.

"I thought, sir," said I, "that you were staying at Woodbury Manor?"

"Yes, I am. For a purpose. I wouldn't be there a moment, Allison, but for this. I want to checkmate that scoundrel's scheme. I tell you, the very thought of it drives me demented."

I guessed what Colonel Darley had in mind in these fierce denunciations, knowing the quality of his affection for Katherine Darley. But without betraying the confidence of Edderley I could do nothing but assume an air of surprise. I asked him what the scheme was. A financial scheme? Had it anything to do with the anonymous letter?

Colonel Darley with a "Pish!" cast all that behind him.

"I can't afford to lose any money," said he. "But that's not what worries me, Allison. It's the way this scoundrel Bardolph has got hold of my brother, Iscaster. Do you know my niece, Katherine?"

I told him that Edderley had brought her to see me.

"Well, you've seen her and spoken to her. You've seen Bardolph and spoken to him. She's a lady—that's not everything. But she's a good girl and a fine girl, clean and straight. He's not a gentleman—that's not everything either, Allison, as we found out over there, eh? But he's a

dirty, scrounging cad, a beastly fellow. He poisons me. Will you believe that my brother means to marry his girl to Bardolph?"

"I should have difficulty in believing it," said I, "unless you told me seriously that it was a fact."

Colonel Darley leaned from his chair towards me, white-faced, his eyes full of rage.

"I do tell you seriously," he said. "And I suppose there's no legal way to stop him."

"Indeed there is," I said. "Miss Darley has only to refuse to marry Mr. Bardolph and Mr. Bardolph can't marry her."

"Damn you, Allison!" cried the Colonel angrily. "I didn't come here to hear you patter platitudes. Of course, the devil of it is that I'm not so sure Katherine will refuse. Iscaster has been playing ducks and drakes with his estates. Katherine is fond of him. He'll play on her feeling for the Darleys and her affection for him. Bardolph will settle a million on her or something—and there you are. The damned outrage is done."

I told Colonel Darley I should be very sorry if this estimate of the situation came true, but we were helpless. If Miss Darley made up her mind to accept Bardolph in a travesty of marriage for the reasons he had given, they would be married.

I began to find the interview embarrassing. I knew that Miss Darley would no more marry Bardolph than she would fly over the moon, but

I could not tell him so. He seemed to think me cold and indifferent, and his passion boiled.

"It's all very well for you damned lawyers, Allison—you've no more blood than a fish. But I tell you plainly that rather than see Bardolph marry my niece I'd shoot him—yes, I'd shoot him!"

His voice rose to a shout in these sentences, and he took no notice of my warning glance as Fenstock opened the door and announced, "Mr. Cantlick."

"What's this about shooting?" asked Cantlick. "Who's going to be shot? Oh—I'm sorry," he added as the Colonel turned to face him.

I introduced them.

"Colonel Darley was saying," I remarked, "that, dog-lover as he is, if he saw a lurcher running off with a chicken he'd shoot him."

"Well said, sir!" Cantlick exclaimed. "And so would I?"

All that Colonel Darley got out of his visit to me was the opportunity of discharging some of his rage. Cantlick's arrival prevented more confidences. After an exchange of desultory things, the Colonel went off.

"Nice old boy," said Cantlick.

"One of the finest men that go on boot-leather," I replied.

"I've had an interesting day in Town," said Cantlick. "Our mysterious prophet is still coming trumps. Iberians have been falling all day.

By the way, what has the Colonel done? Of course, he came to see you about his anonymous letter?"

"Yes. I gather that he has done nothing, and doesn't know what to do."

"You've been pitching him your Bolshy tale, of course?"

"Not a word, Cantlick."

"Then he loves Bardolph about as much as you do. It's curious, Allison. Colonel Darley is the second man I've heard to-day expressing a desire to shoot Bardolph."

I stared at him.

"Then—you overheard?"

"No, not a syllable. But I'm not quite a congenital idiot."

"Well, I dare say a thousand people, Bardolph's victims, would like to shoot him. There's nothing curious in that. It's quite natural."

Cantlick sat on the corner of my table, took out his pipe, filled it, and lit it.

"We needn't spar, need we, Allison?" said he. "You seem a little off your balance. I should like to discuss this with you—but all cards on the table. If you feel any compunction about talking on Colonel Darley's affairs, I'll put your mind at rest. You're such a troglodyte you don't know what's going on in the world. Everybody in London knows that Bardolph intends to marry Miss Katherine Darley—that she's being sold to him by her fool of a father, and that Colonel Darley has hydrophobia about it. So you need

not tell me, because I know, that the Colonel wanted to shoot Bardolph, not on account of the slump in Iberians, but because of this atrocious matrimonial scheme."

"If you know it," said I, "that's that."

"It jolly well is," said Cantlick. "Now, the curious thing I heard to-day was that another man wanted to shoot Bardolph for the same reason."

I was startled. I had not seen Edderley that day. I did not know whether he had been in London. He was the only man who would want to shoot Bardolph for the same reason.

"No," said Cantlick, as though he divined my thought, "not your friend Edderley. A very different person. I went to the office of the Anglo-Iberian to see Mellon, the secretary. Sound man. I wanted to compare impressions with him about this slump. He knows more than he will tell, but I gathered from him that Bardolph was not in it. Bardolph has the wind-up, in fact. Mellon believes, as I did, that the stock will be back in its old place next week. The difference between him and our anonymous friend is that he doesn't think it will go much lower."

"That's all right, Cantlick, but it doesn't interest me," said I.

"Well then, Mellon said he understood I was to be at the dinner-party at Bardolph's on Friday night. I told him 'yes.' He said Bardolph had asked him down. Did I know what the idea was? I told him 'no.' Then he broke out. He

said Bardolph had got a few people together to make the announcement in Lord Iscaster's presence that an engagement had been arranged between him and the Hon. Katherine Darley, and that the announcement was to appear in *The Times* and the *Morning Post* on Saturday. He had it all ready there—typed out. He showed it to me. You know—the usual thing: A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Edward Bardolph, Esq., M.P., of Woodbury Manor, Surrey, and Katherine, only daughter of the Rt. Hon. the Viscount Iscaster. Mellon, who is Bardolph's right-hand man, said his boss was a sanguinary scoundrel, that the marriage was a crime, and that before he was allowed to perpetrate it Bardolph ought to be shot. That's the last thing I hear in London. The first thing I hear when I put my nose in here is the same thing precisely. Do you say it isn't curious?"

"No—of course it's a singular coincidence, Cantlick. Bardolph is going to have a very interesting dinner-party. If I remember right, when Colonel Darley uttered his bloodthirsty sentiment, you heartily endorsed it yourself. Do you want to shoot Bardolph, too?"

"No, Mr. Old Bailey, I don't. I'm not acquainted with Miss Darley. But if Miss Mischief were twenty years older and Bardolph wanted to marry her I'd drill holes in him till he looked like a radiator."

# Chapter Six

No ruffle disturbed the serenity of Thursday. Cantlick and I, looking at the papers, found that Anglo-Iberians still dropped. There was what the City Editors described as "a panicky feeling"; they suggested that a statement by Mr. Bardolph would possibly allay it. We dismissed the subject from our conversational list at my request, and went for a long tramp southwards over the hills.

Friday morning brought the same story of decline, though it was not quite so marked. Bardolph had deigned to take the advice of the City Editors. He had made a statement on the position of the concerns in Mexico and advised every holder of stock to have faith in it. He declared that when the operators in America who were responsible for the scare had been defeated, as they would be in a few days, the facts would startle the markets and Anglo-Iberians would recover their proper position in the list of the world's most stable securities. It went something like that.

"Our prophet," said Cantlick, when he had read it, "is not quite so well this morning. If Iberians have got to go down to ten shillings by Monday morning they will have to be quick. This is a volplane; he prophesied a crash."

I threw my paper aside, impatiently.

"It's a dirty game, whatever the result," said I. "What's the program for to-day?"

"I promised Mellon to play him a round on the Woodbury course," said Cantlick. "He's coming by the train that gets in about ten. I suppose you wouldn't care to come round?"

"No—I want to work to-day. I'm off to Eastbourne this evening. By the way, Cantlick, are you staying overnight at Bardolph's?"

"Not asked," he replied. "No, I'm going to Town by the 9.50. I can just get home before midnight that way."

"And lunch?"

"Well—I hardly cared to suggest it; but might I bring Mellon back here? You could add him to your gallery of character-studies from the City: No. 1, Edward Bardolph; No. 2, Arnold Mellon."

It was not likely that Cantlick would make such a proposal without some purpose. Of course I agreed. Thus at lunch I entertained two of the guests at the famous dinner-party.

Mellon hardly fulfilled my preconception of a secretary in the City. He was a man of parts—a tall, dark fellow of, say, thirty, well-bred and well-educated. He did not once mention Bardolph or finance. He would talk books, or politics, or sport, or gardening. He fell in love with my little garden, so that, instead of going out for a second round, he and Cantlick sat there with

me till tea-time. Then Mellon left for Woodbury Manor, where he had an appointment with Bardolph on business before dinner. I record these details because of what happened afterwards.

A long day. For me it was a blank. My romantic soul concentrated upon the hour of nine at night, when I was to be the means of rescuing Miss Katherine from the dirty paws of the untouchable Bardolph and placing her in the arms of the desirable Edderley. The intervening hours represented mere boredom.

I dined at half-past seven, alone. I told Fenstock to have a good supper. He raised his eyebrows higher than ever. At a quarter to nine he had the car at the garden gate, closed, and my bag mounted on the runningboard. I took my place beside him.

"Drive to the corner first, Fenstock," I said.

The car moved a hundred yards down the road and stopped.

"Now," said I, "drive to Wood End. Go slowly and pull up by the white gate."

Fenstock moved on without a word. It was two miles to the place of assignation. We were there before nine o'clock.

"Pull in on the grass under the trees and switch off the lights," I ordered. Fenstock drew the car against the hedge, switched all off, and sat like a monument.

"Open the offside rear door," said I. Fenstock leaned over and opened the door.

"Fenstock," said I, "we may have passengers this evening and we may not go to Eastbourne—at any rate at present. I don't know.—But it's all the same to you."

"Quite, sir."

"You are a very forgetful man, Fenstock," I added.

"I wasn't aware of it," he answered, "but, if you say so, sir, I am a very forgetful man."

"You can never remember whether we had any passengers or not. You have no memory for faces or places. You just drive where you are told and take no notice of anything but the wheel, the accelerator, and the brake."

"Exactly, sir," said Fenstock.

"Then that's all right," said I. "It's rather dark in the woods, but very pleasant, and I am fond of silence at this time of night."

I looked at Fenstock. He stared at the spokes of the wheel, and, admirable man, made no answer.

Edderley and Miss Darley, coming from Woodbury Manor, had half a mile to walk across the Park to a wicket in the fence and then a few hundred yards through the woods by a path that ended at the white gate. Fenstock and I sat in the front of the car, waiting—I for the sound of footsteps approaching the gate, he for an order from me.

Twice I thought I heard the expected sounds. First there was a crackling of twigs. Then after a few minutes a dull noise as of padding on grass. But nobody approached the white gate.

"There would be poachers about these woods, I expect, Fenstock?" said I.

"I've seen men about betimes that you wouldn't libel if you called them poachers, sir," said the sententious Fenstock. "The pheasants are good this year, I'm told."

As if to confirm Fenstock's suggestion, there came the sound of a distant shot.

"Pheasant is always good," said I.

"Yes, sir," said Fenstock. "I prefer chicken myself."

The little spurt of talk died away. We waited another five minutes, and yet another five. I switched on the dashlight for a moment. It was a quarter-past nine. Almost as I doused the light again, they came to the white gate. Miss Darley was first through. She ran across the road and stepped in at the open door of the car without a word. Edderley was behind her, carrying a small bag and a flat suitcase. He lingered at the gate a moment, peering and listening back into the woods as though for signs of a chase. But there was nothing. Edderley stepped across and entered the car.

"Thanks, Allison," he said. "Shall we drive on?"

"Where?"

"Drive to the main road: then we'll talk a minute."

I touched Fenstock's arm. He switched on the lights. The starter hummed. The car slipped out into the road. The elopement had begun.

Fenstock slowed down as we approached the main road and cast a glance to me.

"Which way, Edderley?" I asked. "North or south?"

"North, if you please, Allison," he answered. "I must have a word with you. Could we stop in some quiet place for a few moments?"

"If you like, of course. But I should tell you that Fenstock is deaf and blind, and has no memory, and if you think time is of any importance there's no need to stop."

"That's good, then," said Edderley. "I'm going to ask you a tremendous thing, Allison. Will you drive all night? It's colossal cheek, I know."

But an all-night drive seemed to me just then exactly the proper thing. It was in the classical tradition that an elopement should take the form of an all-night drive. If Lord Iscaster would only come after us in another car! I was so sure of the capacity of my car and of Fenstock that a dust-up with Lord Iscaster or anybody else would only add spice to a successful adventure.

"Fenstock and I are entirely at your bidding until Monday morning when I am expected at Woodbury again," I told him.

"We're going to Liverpool," said Edderley.

"We must be there before ten in the morning. We could do it by catching the midnight train at Euston, but London is always dangerous to people who don't want to be seen. Do you mind? And does Fenstock think he can do it?"

"I don't mind," said I. "What about it, Fenstock?"

"Two hundred miles," Fenstock replied. "We shall get there by three o'clock."

Edderley gasped.

"Oh, but we don't want to get there by three o'clock. We want to be in Liverpool at half-past nine and at the Coburg Dock at exactly ten. We are safer in the car than anywhere else until then."

"Very well," said I. "You have twelve hours, Fenstock. Keep her down to twenty or thereabouts. Have you a route in mind?"

"Yes, sir," said Fenstock, with a sigh. As I was fonder of forty than twenty I almost sighed with him. "I have it exactly: Reigate, Slough, Banbury, skip Birmingham, Stafford, Stoke, Warrington. I know all the roads."

"Good," said Edderley. "We are your eternal debtors, Allison."

"Eternal nonsense!" I cried. "I never enjoyed anything so much in my life. Is Miss Darley comfortable?"

"She isn't here," Edderley replied.

"What!" I shouted, putting on the dashlight

and looking round. Miss Darley was seated in the corner behind me.

"Allow me, my dear Allison, to introduce you to Mrs. Edderley," he went on. "We were married by special license this morning."

"Oh!" I said, crestfallen. "So 'tis not an elopement after all!"

## Chapter Seven

FENSTOCK kept his time-table as accurately as an express train. At daylight we passed through the dismal outskirts of Stoke-on-Trent. At nine o'clock we were in Warrington, and then ran slowly into Liverpool, and at quarter to ten were rolling down the dingy cobbled street that led to the Coburg Dock.

We had not talked much on the way. At Northwich Fenstock had gone to a shop—the only one we saw open—and bought biscuits, which we ate. Mrs. Edderley had dozed in her corner. Edderley had told me a little about the dinner-party. They were six at the table—Bardolph, Lord Iscaster, Colonel Darley, Cantlick, Mellon, the secretary, and Edderley. Miss Darley had been unable to dine: she suffered from a dreadful headache and had begged to be excused.

It had been understood that Lord Iscaster would make the announcement of the engagement of his daughter to Bardolph, who would indicate the settlement he proposed to make upon her, and that this would be done soon after dinner. A little delay occurred. Mellon was called on the telephone just as the port was brought in. Bardolph, evidently on tenterhooks about the nature of the message, sat impatiently awaiting his return. Edderley wished to avoid the conspicuous-

ness of absence from the table at the same time, and sat till Mellon came back. While Mellon and Bardolph, having prayed excuse, were talking in undertones, he said something about the heat of the room, went to a dining-room window, pulled back the curtain, and slipped through.

He joined his wife at the wicket gate into the woods, where she had been waiting for him ten minutes, having told her maid she would stroll in the gardens to ease her headache with the fresh air.

Then they had reached the car.

I listened carefully to Edderley's story, and I felt sure, even then, that he was keeping something back. But, whatever it was, his wife had no knowledge of it. Her brow was bright. Having taken and kept her resolution, she had the English girl's clear mind on it, and no reservations.

The rush to Liverpool was the result of an inspiration. They were bound for the last place in the world where anybody would dream of looking for a runaway couple, by the last route in the world that anybody would search. They were going to the Canary Islands by a boat which took eight or nine days to get there. "Mr. and Mrs. Harrison" had a stateroom on the S. S. *Andalusian,* secured by telegram.

The *Andalusian* was tied up alongside a cavernous warehouse in the Coburg Dock, with her nose pointing towards a swing bridge and the mud-colored Mersey. When the car pulled up in the depths of the warehouse, dockers were

driving home the last bolts of the hatches and fitting the last tarpaulins. Mrs. Edderley paused at the gangway to say a word of adieu to me while Edderley shook hands with Fenstock, to the great confusion of that ordinarily imperturbable man.

"Mr. Allison, Jim and I are very grateful to you," she said.

"I shan't be grateful if you say another word about it," I protested. "Terribly tame elopement, don't you think?"

"Unless they send a torpedo boat destroyer after us, or something. But it was quite exciting enough for me: I don't often do it."

Her fortunate husband joined the radiant creature, and gripped my hand.

"Thanks, Allison," said he.

"Good luck!" I wished them. "A pleasant time in the Fortunate Islands, Mrs. Harrison."

They were the last passengers on board. The ship cast off at ten o'clock to the tick. I stood in the doorway of the warehouse and watched her warp out into the Mersey and turn down-stream. Then I went back to Fenstock.

"We'll go and get some food, Fenstock," said I, "and buy a newspaper."

"I have one, sir," said Fenstock. "You will not be alarmed, sir, will you? There's some news in it which—well, sir, you'd better see it."

He pulled out of his pocket an early edition of the Liverpool *Echo*. A boy was shouting it up and down the dock.

I opened the sheet and saw nothing but suggestions about the horses I should back if I wished to make money. I looked inquiry at Fenstock. He pointed to a few lines in the white "Stop Press" space. I read:

"Mr. Edward Bardolph, the financier, chairman of the Anglo-Iberian Corporation, was found shot dead at his residence, Woodbury Manor, Surrey, last night."

# Chapter Eight

I HAVE called Fenstock imperturbable. He is. He and I had some acquaintance together with disagreeable and astonishing things on the other side of the Channel. Over there he took the disagreeable things with philosophy and treated the astonishing ones with indifference.

But even Fenstock was disturbed by this appalling news. He did not blink an eyelid over it; yet it had made a perceptible impression on his stolidity. I stood beside the car, with the paper crammed up in my hand, staring at him.

Appalling news. Not that the death of Bardolph caused me any regrets. On the whole, the world would undoubtedly be a more habitable place in the absence of Bardolph. But how did Bardolph die? And how would the manner of his death affect other people? And whom?

An unreflecting fear assailed me. It was appalling news.

Men, apparently on the staff of the shipping company which owned the *Andalusian,* passing back through the transit shed from the quay, looked curiously at us. Their glances woke me out of a reverie that may have lasted five minutes.

"All the same, Fenstock," said I, "we must go and get breakfast. Do you know a place?"

"There's the big hotels, sir—Adelphi, North Western . . ."

"No, of course not," said I, getting in beside him. "Some quiet place where we can feed at the same table, Fenstock."

"I know a place, sir. Shall I drive there?"

Fenstock's place was a small restaurant not far from Lime Street Station, where we were alone at breakfast. It was nearly half-past ten. Normal Liverpool had broken its fast long since. After a long night of road-faring we both felt hungry.

"Now, Fenstock," said I, when we had satisfied our first cravings, "how long will it take you to drive to Hull?"

"That's right across England," he remarked.

"Exactly. Hull has two advantages for us, Fenstock. It is far enough away to have no special connection with Liverpool in anybody's mind. And my sister lives just outside Hull. As I told you last night, Fenstock, I received an urgent letter from my sister, imploring me to go and see her at once."

"So you did, sir."

"And I asked you whether you would mind a long night drive in order that we might be there to-day."

"Of course you did, sir."

"We should have been there at ten o'clock this morning if we had not picked up tire-trouble on the way."

"Two very nasty punctures, sir—one just out-

side Peterborough and the other ten miles from Grantham. They delayed us at least two hours, and then there was that plaguy short in the electric circuit which took so long to find. Altogether I should not be surprised if we didn't get to Hull before one o'clock."

"Excellent, Fenstock!" I cried. "You have the idea exactly. I will lunch with my sister at half-past one. We will then consider the question of sleep, among others."

"And," said Fenstock, "if you're ready, sir, we'll be moving now. I think you might find it advisable not to leave the car standing about. The police are sometimes curious about registration numbers."

Last evening the maintenance of secrecy and the covering of tracks had seemed like a rather jolly game. This morning the game became a serious preoccupation. We cleared Liverpool at eleven o'clock, and, with no Edderley to check him, Fenstock made a grim face and let her go. He knew, as if by instinct, the way to avoid Manchester and the larger towns. He drove from the Mersey to the Humber in little more than two hours.

My sister lived in a pleasant little house between Hull and Beverley. Her husband did something in Hull, I hardly knew what, but he made a lot of money at it. Something to do with trawlers. He was called William on his birth certificate, but "Will" everywhere else—even on his own advertisements. As we passed Goole and

dodged Hull, his name began to offend the landscape in many places: "Will Wilby—Patent Composition." No doubt this conveyed something to whom it concerned, but nothing to me. I knew him only slightly. He seemed a thoroughly sound fellow; I could only hope his composition was as good. But, for the moment, I was chiefly anxious to discover some way of circumventing his curiosity about an unannounced visit from me. If it had been any other day but Saturday, he would not have been home to lunch. As it was, we should probably just catch him. If I could get a word with my sister before I saw her husband, I could tell her about the supposititious letter she had sent to me; if not there would have to be some other improvisation.

When we pulled in at the gateway of Wilby's villa, his car stood at the door. The sound of our engine brought Wilby himself to the portico.

"Why!" he exclaimed, as I got out, "Allison—good Lord, Margaret, where are you? Here's your brother."

So the improvisation had to begin at once.

"How do, Wilby?" I said. "Surprised to see me blow in? But I hope you haven't finished lunch. How's Margaret?"

"Splendid. No, haven't started. You're just in time. What the mischief are you doing in the benighted North? Anyhow, glad to see you, Allison. Go and wash. That your man?"

"Yes—Fenstock. Can you do anything for him?"

"Rather. I'll ring for my own petrol waster, and he'll fit him up with something to eat. Now—come in. Where's Margaret? Never mind, come along and wash. I'm deuced hungry and I'm off to golf at three."

My loquacious brother-in-law was giving me a little time for reflection; but I could see no way out of the muddle. Nor did a way open by chance. As luck had it, when I got to the dining-room my sister was there with her husband and they had already been speculating together upon the purpose of my visit.

# Chapter Nine

In the upshot, no elaborate improvisation proved necessary. I had no intimate acquaintance with Wilby. I knew him as the jolly and successful man who had rushed my sister off her feet and married her in a month. During that luncheon, I began to understand both why Wilby had made a fortune in his mysterious business and why my sister had been unable to resist him. In the first place, Wilby's blue eyes looked far beyond the topics with which his hurried tongue was dealing. In the next, he revealed himself a loyal and steadfast soul.

I was hemming and hawing my way into some incomprehensible explanation of my presence when Wilby said:

"You aren't flattering us much, Allison, are you? Got a poor opinion of the brains north of the Trent? I've noticed before that certain condescension in southerners."

I protested.

"Well, then," said he, "out with it! You can't think we don't read the papers or that we can't add two and two. When did you leave Woodbury? Last night? And you've been driving all night to see your sister about an incoherent something or other? Poppycock, my dear Allison! Of course, you were started off by this business

of the shooting of Bardolph. I suppose it's no good to hope you shot him yourself and have come to us for sanctuary? If you have, I'm your man. I said when I read of the death of Bardolph, 'Hurroo! Dam' good riddance.' So out with it."

Wilby's onslaught left me breathless.

"Don't be silly, Will," my sister said. "Of course, Sam would have nothing to do with a person like that. Let him tell his tale his own way."

"He don't seem to know a way," Wilby remarked.

And Wilby was right. My improvisation machinery seemed out of gear. I looked straight into Wilby's blue eyes and determined that the best yarn to tell him would be the exact truth. So I began:

"When I left Woodbury last night I knew nothing about the death of Bardolph. But it is true that if I had not seen a telegram in the paper three or four hours ago announcing his death I should not now be inflicting myself on you, Wilby."

And then I told them the whole story of the dinner-party, the elopement, the departure of Edderley and his wife from Liverpool, and the rush across England to Hull as soon as I learned what had happened at Woodbury Manor.

All the time I spoke Wilby's blue eyes were fastened on me, and he never put in a word. When I came to an end, he said:

"Have you got the paper you saw at Liverpool?"

I pulled it out of my pocket and handed it to him, pointing to the blurred paragraph in the Stop Press space. He read it and passed it back.

"What made you come to the conclusion that Bardolph . . . No. I mean, why were you anxious to put up an alibi from Liverpool this morning, Allison?"

I looked curiously at him before answering.

"I don't think," I said, slowly, "that I should be asked any questions about that."

"You said you didn't know of Bardolph's death before you left Woodbury with your friend and the lady. Assumption: that Bardolph was not then dead."

I had not included in my story anything about the long wait Fenstock and I had at Wood End or of the conversation between us, or of the thing that happened which, in the light of Bardolph's death, seemed so disquieting.

"I don't know anything about that, and I can't assume anything," said I.

"But you've got a hypothesis," said Wilby. "And it was that hypothesis which brought you racing across from Liverpool to Hull."

"Not a hypothesis, Wilby. Only the vague shadow of a possibility."

"Well," said he, "put it at that. I've got later news than you had at Liverpool. Read this."

He passed me an early edition of an evening

paper, and I read, in addition to the first announcement:

"A later message states that Mr. Bardolph was discovered seated at his dining-table with a revolver in his hand. The news of the tragedy, coming immediately upon the steady slump in the Anglo-Iberian Corporation, of which Mr. Bardolph was the leading spirit, has had a sensational effect upon the stock of that company. The Stock Exchange is, of course, closed to-day, but the rush away from Anglo-Iberians has become a panic. The offices of the company are not open, and no information can be obtained there."

"Good heavens!" I cried, "a suicide!"

"Looks like it," said Wilby.

I felt a happy revulsion from the strain of an idea which I had not ventured to formulate in words—was, as I had told Wilby, hardly so much as a hypothesis. Nevertheless, it had racked me. The thought that the happy eyes of Katherine Edderley might soon be darkened by a mortal sorrow had been unbearable.

"Anyhow," said Wilby, breaking the pause, "you have your alibi, my boy. Now, what's your program?"

"To get south again at once," said I. "Cantlick will be wondering. He was going back to Byfleet last night, but if this thing occurred while he was at Woodbury I expect he's been looking me up and wondering what has happened to me. By the way, could I telephone through to him?"

"Long-distance call," said Wilby; "but it's

Saturday afternoon. You might get through quickly."

I decided to put the call through to Byfleet first, and was lucky enough to be connected with Cantlick's house within twenty minutes. Mrs. Cantlick answered.

I told her I was speaking from my sister's place at Hull, and wanted to explain to Cantlick that I had been called suddenly to the North in case he should be looking for me at Eastbourne. She replied that Cantlick was not at home. He had returned by the train just after midnight, as he had arranged, but had wakened her to say that he was off first thing in the morning and might be away for a week or more.

Where had he gone? I asked. He had gone to France on business. I staggered a little. Cantlick had said nothing to me of business in France. Indeed, he had talked about playing golf on the Saturday. Between the time when he left me and his return to Byfleet—which was exactly the time required to go to Bardolph's dinner-party and return home—this urgency of business in France had arisen.

Mrs. Cantlick said something about the horrible discovery at Woodbury Manor, and then the line got noisy. I finished by shouting a word or two of remembrance to Miss Mischief and hung up the receiver.

I looked blankly at Wilby when I returned to the dining-room.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Cantlick's gone," said I, "gone to France—suddenly—this morning."

"That's two," said Wilby.

"Two what?"

"Two of Bardolph's dinner guests vamoosed. Edderley first. Now Cantlick. How many more were there?"

"Three more," I replied. "Lord Iscaster, Colonel Darley, and Bardolph's secretary, Mellon."

"Ah—I wonder if they've all found pressing business somewhere else, Allison? Shall we telephone round?"

"Don't be asinine!" I exclaimed, wondering at the serious eyes and the straight face Wilby kept.

"I'm not ragging, Allison. Something strange behind all this. See if I'm not right. I'll lay you ten to one that if you ring up Colonel Darley you'll find that there's something very strange indeed."

I could hardly believe Wilby was in earnest. But he left no doubt about it.

"Where does Colonel Darley live?" he asked. I told him the address in Jermyn Street. He fished out a big telephone directory and found the Exchange and number. "You'll get London in no time. Try."

Against my better judgment I let him put in the call. We waited no more than a few minutes. Colonel Darley's man answered.

"Captain Allison speaking," I said. "Is Colonel Darley at home?"

"No, sir," was the answer.

"Do you know where I can get him?"

"No, sir. Colonel Darley left this morning and said he would be away for a few days. I can take a message, but no letters are to be sent."

"Well," said Wilby, as I rang off, "am I right?"

This extraordinary collocation of facts dumbfounded me. I collapsed into a chair between Wilby and my sister, asking feebly:

"What does it mean?"

"It means that if I were a friend of Edderley and the Colonel and Cantlick I should want to be on the spot and discover exactly what happened at Bardolph's dinner-party," he returned.

I said that was what I meant to do as soon as might be, but without Cantlick or Edderley what could I discover? And if I discovered anything, what could I do with it?"

"You're a bit upset, Allison," said Wilby. "Look here—"

He checked himself and glanced at his wife. There seemed to be a kind of telepathic confidence between them.

"Will," said she, "Sam's in a puzzle. You're pretty good at puzzles. Why don't you go with him and hold his arms up for a day or two?"

"Pearl among women!" he exclaimed. "I was about to suggest it myself, but it's a fairly cool suggestion, all the same."

"Cool or not," said I, eagerly, "will you come, Wilby?"

"No reason why not, Mrs. Wilby permitting, if you'll promise me the round of golf on Monday that I'm missing this afternoon."

So it was that Fenstock had two passengers that afternoon, and that, reaching my cottage at midnight, Wilby came straight into the Bardolph affair.

# Chapter Ten

I HAD sent from Goole, just after we started from Wilby's house, a telegram to my housekeeper telling her that Fenstock and myself would be home late and that my brother-in-law would be with me. She was not to wait up, but to leave some sandwiches for us.

To my surprise, Mrs. Batting disobeyed the order. She had opened the door before I could get out my key. Something in her expression betrayed a special reason for disobedience. Therefore I said nothing. She led the way to the dining-room, where a fire was burning and a supper was laid. Fenstock brought my bag and Wilby's into the passage.

"Will you come for a moment, sir, to see that Mr. Wilby's room is all right?" Mrs. Batting asked me, with significance. I told Wilby to make himself comfortable in my long chair and followed her out. She went to my study, switched on the light and closed the door. Then she excused herself for being up when I had told her to be in bed.

"Mr. Cantlick called last night, sir, coming from Woodbury Manor on his way to the station. He came in and asked if he might write a note. He sat down here to write, and he gave me the note, told me to put it in my pocket, show

it to nobody, say nothing about it to anybody, and give it to you privately as soon as you returned."

From some recess of her ample skirt Mrs. Batting pulled a letter and handed it to me.

"Thank you, Mrs. Batting," said I; "you're the soul of discretion. And now you'd better go to bed. We'll look after ourselves. I suppose you've had a fire lit in Mr. Wilby's room? Good."

The excellent woman was loving the mystery; but she went off at once. I opened Cantlick's note and read:

Friday night.

DEAR ALLISON,—I've no more than a minute to spare. I'm catching the 9.50 home. You will have heard all about Bardolph before you see this. I want you not to make any inquiries as to my whereabouts in the next few days. That's all, *but it's important.* Mellon is staying at Woodbury Manor, and he'll tell you what happened. Better burn this.

Ever,

R. C.

I stood, hesitating for a moment or two. Should I show this note to Wilby? Would it be fair to Cantlick? Then I thought of Wilby's straight-looking blue eyes, and remembered that we had already inquired about Cantlick's whereabouts. I walked back to the dining-room, and said to Wilby: "Here's a message from Cantlick. He left it for me last night."

"Anything interesting?" he asked, with his mouth full of sandwich. I gave him the note.

"Cantlick's a particular friend of yours, isn't

he?" said Wilby, as he passed back the note. I threw it in the fire.

"Yes," I said. "Ever since we were at school together. I'm godfather to his little witch of a girl. He's my closest friend."

"Then there's nothing fishy about Cantlick. Tell you what, Allison, there's a lot more in this than meets the eye. We'll get it out of Mellon to-morrow. You said he was Bardolph's secretary. Do you know him?"

"Met him once only—here. Cantlick brought him to lunch the other day. Why, it was yesterday! It seems an age ago. He appears to be a decent chap."

"Then, we'll wait till we see Mellon before speculating. I was famished, Allison. Don't mind me starting on the tuck while you were outside? Then bed's the order of the day. You must be almost at the end of your tether."

Having had no sleep since Thursday, I was about all in. We talked no more that night.

I slept till ten next morning. Long before that, Wilby had been up, making an excursion in the neighborhood, and had got a Sunday paper.

"Expeditious people down here in Surrey," said he as I entered the dining-room. "I see they held the inquest on Bardolph yesterday afternoon, and finished it right off. Verdict, suicide during temporary insanity. Here's the report. The Coroner doesn't seem to have been specially inquisitive, Allison. I should have wanted to know a lot more."

He gave me the paper.

It was a curious feature of the Bardolph affair that the circumstances of Bardolph's death seemed to interest people less—certainly it interested the newspapers less—than the effect it produced in the stock markets. It might almost have been thought that Bardolph took his life specifically to bring ruin upon the speculators in his financial concerns.

The inquest had been held at Woodbury Manor without a jury. The Coroner had called Arnold Mellon to identify the body of his chief and to tell the story of the dinner-party. He had called also the footman, one Evans, who found Bardolph dead at the dining-table with a revolver in his hand, and the police officer who was telephoned for by Mellon, and he had forthwith said that the facts were very clear and entered his verdict.

The narrative Mellon gave of the dinner-party was a bald affair. No doubt it satisfied people who knew nothing of the surrounding circumstances. To us, it was amazing that anybody could be satisfied with it.

"Your Mellon man is keeping a lot up his sleeve, isn't he?" said Wilby as I put down the paper.

"Looks so. But let's judge Mellon first-hand," I remarked. "I'm going to ring him up and get him over here."

Mellon himself answered my ring, said he would be very glad to come, and, indeed, arrived

not long after I had finished breakfast. He seemed surprised and none too well pleased to find another visitor with me, but greeted Wilby with grave courtesy when I introduced him as my brother-in-law.

I explained circumstantially that I had been suddenly called to the North on Friday night by a message from my sister at Hull, and that Wilby had come back with me for a week-end, and hoped to get a game on the Monday: I wondered whether Mellon would be able to oblige him. He shook his head.

"Out of the question," he said. "Far too busy—and the funeral of Mr. Bardolph will be to-morrow afternoon."

So we naturally settled down to the subject of Bardolph.

"I was telling Wilby," said I, "how the dinner-party on Friday night was expected to be a rather ceremonial occasion. You know, Mellon, I heard of the affair suddenly when Wilby came home yesterday morning with a brief report in an early edition. It was some shock."

"Yes," said Mellon, looking very straight at me. "No doubt you were greatly surprised. You could not have had any premonition of the affair, of course. I thought you were going to Eastbourne?" he said, suddenly.

I looked just as straight at Mellon.

"I had intended to go to Eastbourne," said I, "but on Friday evening after you left I had a letter from my sister. She wanted to see me

urgently. I could have gone down to Yorkshire by the midnight train from St. Pancras, but I like road traveling better, so my man took me all the way in the car."

"Yes, I see. It would be better on the road than in a night train. But you must have had a very short stay in Hull and a long spell without sleep."

I cursed the fellow silently. What was he driving at? I directed the talk back to Bardolph and his dinner-party.

"I described what happened at the inquest yesterday," said Mellon, dryly. "There's a report in the *Observer*. You've seen it, of course?"

"Yes, but I thought—"

"Excuse me, Allison," said Wilby, suddenly. "I want to write some letters. Do you mind if I go up and write now while you and Mr. Mellon are having your talk?"

He walked out of the room without waiting for any protest. Mellon looked after him.

## Chapter Eleven

"KEEN eyes your brother-in-law has," said Mellon. "Now, you want to know all about the dinner-party. May we go and sit in your delightful garden?"

His manner had changed suddenly and radically with Wilby's departure. I led the way through the French window on to the little terrace. There he told me his story of Friday night.

"You were in the confidence of Major Edderley, I know," said he.

I nodded.

"So I need not tell you at length about the real reason for this dinner-party. Mr. Bardolph intended to make it a ceremonial occasion for announcing his approaching marriage to the Honorable Katherine Darley. His plans were a little upset by the untoward events on the Stock Exchange and the ruinous fall in the shares of the Corporation in which Mr. Bardolph was chiefly interested. . . ."

"Nevertheless?"

"Nevertheless, he went on with them. He had assembled a number of people before whom he desired to make the announcement—Lord Iscaster, who was his fiancée's father; Colonel Darley, who was her uncle; Major Edderley, whom she wanted to marry . . ."

"Edderley told me that he had obtained the invitation through Colonel Darley," said I.

"Major Edderley may have thought so," Mellon replied, "but he did not know Mr. Bardolph. If Mr. Bardolph had not wanted Major Edderley to be present to witness his formal betrothal, not all the colonels in the Army could have got him there—and especially not Colonel Darley. As I dare say you know, Colonel Darley and Mr. Bardolph had no very high opinion of one another. . . . Then there was Mr. Cantlick, and he was there because Mr. Bardolph wanted to keep an eye on Mr. Cantlick just now."

I stared my astonishment.

"That is so," said Mellon. "I know Mr. Cantlick is a friend of yours. Perhaps you can imagine why Mr. Bardolph wanted to keep an eye on him. But it doesn't matter now. . . .

"The last of the party was to have been Miss Darley herself, but she had a most severe and unfortunate headache and could not come down to dinner."

"You have not mentioned yourself," said I.

"Oh—well, I am taken for granted—a paid servant, a general utility man, to answer telephones and ward off annoyances. So six of us dined. It was not a very amusing dinner. Mr. Bardolph was preoccupied, intensely worried about his affairs, as you may imagine. Lord Iscaster was in even worse case. I suppose you know that the fall in Anglo-Iberian stock means ruin for his lordship?"

"I did not know," said I. "Of course, I can have no knowledge of Lord Iscaster's affairs."

"No, I suppose not," said Mellon, turning in his chair to look at me with another straight gaze.

So, the anonymous correspondent who had warned Cantlick and Colonel Darley so accurately of what was going to happen had not favored Lord Iscaster with the information. I wondered why.

"Major Edderley was naturally not at supreme ease," Mellon went on. "Mr. Cantlick and I made what conversation we could without talking about Anglo-Iberians. But the dinner was very dull. Just as the port was brought in, I was called to the telephone. I had understood that the program was this: over the port, Lord Iscaster was to state that he had given his consent to the marriage of his daughter to Mr. Bardolph. Mr. Bardolph was then to mention the nature of the settlements he proposed to make. There was to be a toast."

Mellon paused and eyed me curiously.

"You don't go to church?" said he with an air of changing a dangerous subject for a safe one.

"Oh, yes, I do," I declared; "but it's too late this morning."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. You don't go to church on Friday mornings, by any chance?"

I stared at him with frank astonishment for several moments till the light broke in. Then I went cold with apprehension. I did not know Mellon well. He might be a dangerous man.

He had got hold of a part of Edderley's secret. How big a part I could not possibly know. I pulled myself together.

"What a strange question!" said I. "No—I never go to church except on Sundays."

"Ah, well, never mind. Where was I? Oh, at the telephone. I received a message at the telephone which proved that Mr. Bardolph's plan of marrying Miss Darley could not be carried out."

"Why?" I asked, without daring to look him in the face. I felt as though his eyes were boring into me.

"Because," he answered, "there was no such person as Miss Darley. The lady who was masquerading with a headache upstairs was not Miss Darley, but a married woman."

"Good heavens!" I put as much surprise into my voice as I could muster, but still I could not look Mellon in the face. He uttered a queer little laugh.

"And you went back and told Bardolph what you had learned?"

"I went back and told Mr. Bardolph that I had an important private message for him. He excused himself and asked his guests to go along to the billiard-room, where he would join them presently. They went."

"They must have been astonished," said I.

"Perhaps. But they went. Then I told Mr. Bardolph. He made some comments. Then he ordered me to go to the billiard-room and see

that his guests had all they wanted while he considered what he should do. I went. They were just ringing for a marker. They looked at me for some explanation of the incident. I said Mr. Bardolph would be there immediately. They did not play billiards, but the footman busied himself getting drinks. In about five minutes we heard a disturbance in the corridor, and the butler came running in, crying out that Mr. Bardolph had shot himself. We rushed down to the dining-room, and there was Mr. Bardolph sitting where we had left him at the table, dead, with a bullet through his head and a revolver in his hand. The rest you have read in the report of the inquest. We rang up a doctor and the police, and the guests left for London by the 9.50 train."

Mellon came to an end of his story. It was an exact reproduction of what he had told the Coroner, except that he made no allusion in public to the purpose of the dinner-party, had not brought in Miss Darley's name, and had left the Coroner to assume—as he did—that the telephone message concerned Bardolph's business.

To all appearance, Bardolph had committed suicide in order to escape the ruin which was about to fall on him by the collapse of the great financial skyscraper he had reared.

I passed my cigarette-case to Mellon and lit a cigarette myself. We sat for a few minutes without speaking. Then I said:

"I suppose you do not know to whom Miss Darley was married, and when?"

There was a perceptible silence before Mellon replied:

"Mr. Allison, I know as much about that as you do, and no more."

I ground the end of my cigarette into the arm of the chair and looked at Mellon. His dark face was impassive, but his eyes seemed to be piercing me through.

"Wilby and I thought," I said, "that we would like to go over and see the place after lunch. Would there be any reason why not?"

"None whatever," he said. "I take it that you will tell Mr. Wilby nothing more"—he hesitated—"nothing more than you think proper."

"Quite so," said I. "I don't think it's necessary to tell him anything more than he knows already."

By the time we went into lunch I felt like a man who has had a strenuous fencing bout. I was forced to admit to myself that I could make nothing of Mellon.

# Chapter Twelve

THERE is a malignant form of blindness that specially afflicts intelligent people. I suffered from it that Sunday. To say that is to lay claim to some sort of intelligence, of course, though I confess I displayed none that day. It is the blindness of a prepossession.

I had preconceived notions about the Bardolph affair. Before the published circumstances showed Bardolph's death to be a suicide, I had rushed to the conclusion that he was murdered—I suppose because I thought it the most appropriate thing that could happen to him, and certain indications induced me to make that impulsive rush to Hull in order to set up an alibi from Liverpool. These two theories, one supplanting the other, had been so firmly fixed in my mind that I could see nothing else.

Not so my brother-in-law, Wilby. He had no prepossessions.

I noted both before luncheon and while we were feeding that Mellon had set up a prickly hedge between himself and Wilby, and I could not understand it then. Afterwards the reason became quite plain. They were perfectly polite, but whereas Mellon was cordial enough to me, he was cool to Wilby—seemed to be desperately on his guard.

However, he made no objection to my sugges-

tion that after lunch we might all go over to Woodbury Manor and see the scene of the tragedy. We walked through Woodbury village to the main gate and so by the long drive through the park.

I rather admired Wilby's perspicacity. A chance remark put him in possession of the fact that Mellon's mania was golf. Wilby was a brother maniac. They began to talk golf.

At once the prickly hedge came down. They discussed clubs, strokes, courses, holes, caddies, games, incidents, miracles, misfortunes, prowess, failure and handicaps, particularly handicaps—all with a fervor worthy of religion. Throughout that walk Bardolph was never mentioned, and, by the time we reached the terrace in front of Woodbury Manor House, to all outward seeming they might have been life-long friends. Myself being outside the freemasonry of golf, it appeared a miraculous thing to me. They could hardly leave the subject even when we were in the hall and a footman had relieved us of our hats and sticks.

I had never been in the house before. I expected to find evidences of millionairedom, splashes of Bardolphian magnificence, anachronisms, false splendor—and I found nothing. Woodbury Manor was a respectable old house, rather modest, and Bardolph had left it alone. I remarked on this.

"Yes," said Mellon. "Mr. Bardolph would have nothing altered. True, he hadn't been at

Woodbury much more than a year; but I think if he had lived here half a century he would have altered nothing. He knew the values of things even if he knew nothing about the things themselves. The only alteration he made in the old arrangements was to drop game preserving: he was no sportsman, and he didn't see the force of maintaining keepers and all that."

He took us straight to the dining-room. It was a very charming room, possibly thirty feet long and half as wide, with three large French windows giving on the terrace. Heavy curtains in blue hung at the side of each. The paneling of the room was brown, and the beams of the ceiling had been left in their original position and state through all the reparations. It was unsensationally furnished. At one end was a bookcase built into the wall. Opposite the windows stood a large sideboard. The dining-table was quite small. Its dull polish reflected the beams and plaster of the ceiling. Half a dozen chairs surrounded it.

"This is where it happened," said Mellon. "The inquest was held here yesterday."

No appropriate comment seemed to occur to either of us. We just gazed. Mellon went to one of the windows and scanned the park. Wilby walked quietly round the room, looked at a landscape piece hanging over the fireplace at one end of the room, and at the books in the shelves at the other, took out a volume or two and fluttered the leaves.

I was turning towards the door and about to thank Mellon for his courtesy when Wilby laid his hand on my sleeve.

"I suppose," he said, "that Mr. Bardolph sat here at the head of the table?"

Mellon turned sharply.

"Yes," he said, "of course."

"And the others—"

"Look here!" Mellon exclaimed. "I shouldn't have thought fellows like you would be so morbid. But as you evidently want the scene of the—the scene of the dinner-party reconstituted, as they say in the police reports, here it all is. You sit there at the head of the table, Mr. Wilby, and you'll be Bardolph—just as he sat for an hour before he died. You sit facing the window, Mr. Allison, and you'll be Lord Iscaster. If I take this end, I shall be myself. And that's the reconstitution and all there is to it."

Mellon's manner was strangely huffy. I was about to say that we had no morbid interest in the scene and that there was no need for any play-acting. But Wilby again forestalled me.

"Very well," he said. "I'll sit where Mr. Bardolph sat. There you are, Allison, take that chair and be Lord Iscaster. What about the others? Where was Colonel Darley?"

"By his brother's side," said Mellon, shortly.

"And Major Edderley?"

"Opposite, facing the fireplace."

"And Mr. Cantlick?"

"Next to Major Edderley."

"And the empty chair on my left was for Miss Darley, of course."

Wilby looked around the room from Bardolph's chair. His glance paused at the center window, and again sailed over Mellon's head to the end of the room.

"You came from the telephone to talk to Bardolph here where he sat?" he asked.

Mellon nodded.

"And then the other four went out to the billiard-room at Bardolph's request?"

"Yes."

"And left you talking with him? And then you joined the others in the billiard-room, and in five minutes Bardolph was dead. It was curious that he should have had a revolver in his pocket at the dinner-table."

"I don't know that he had. But why curious? If he meant to commit suicide, it wasn't curious. Anyhow, it wasn't curious. I happen to know that he was never without a revolver."

"Oh," said Wilby; "but that's curious, anyhow. I see the police stated at the inquest that the gun had been fully loaded and only one cartridge was fired."

"Yes," said Mellon, a little impatiently, "a man doesn't want two shots to kill himself with."

"No, of course not," Wilby admitted. "And nobody heard the shot fired?"

"Apparently not. It's not surprising. This is an old-fashioned house, and the servants' quarters are away at the end of a long corridor, be-

yond the billiard-room where we were—and we didn't hear it."

Wilby got up from the table and thanked Mellon for his "reconstruction," said he didn't wonder he thought it a bit morbid of us, and immediately added that he would like to see the billiard-room. Mellon led the way there along the corridor that ran through the middle of the house.

"Just a billiard-room," said he, with a note of contempt in his voice as he threw the door open.

"Ah, yes," said Wilby. "Well, thanks. That's that. The Woodbury golf course starts at the end of the park, doesn't it? Could we go back that way, Allison? I'd like to see the third you were telling me about, Mellon. I rather fancy my long shot . . ."

And so off again to golf. Mellon's face cleared and his temper improved as we walked through the gardens and along a private path towards the links. On rising ground to our left was a thick belt of trees—the woods through which Edderley and his wife had reached the white gate and my car on Friday night. The two maniacs went to the third hole and paced it and argued about it. As we were turning away, Wilby asked me if we could get back through the woods: he was fond of woodland walks. I looked the question at Mellon.

"Yes," he said, "it's twice as far, but pleasant enough. I'd go with you as far as Wood End, but I've rather a lot to do. Follow the path to

a wicket gate about the middle of that belt of trees, and you'll be on the way to Wood End, where a white gate will let you into the road about two miles from Mr. Allison's cottage. I expect he knows it."

"Quite well," said I.

"And there's no chance of a round with you?" Wilby asked.

"Afraid not. I must get back to London immediately after the funeral to-morrow, and I don't know when I shall be down again."

"Ah, well," said Wilby, "some other time. Good-by, and thanks."

We parted, Mellon to go back to the house, Wilby and I taking the path he had pointed out. Wilby kept silence till we were breasting the slope leading up to the wood.

"This was the way Edderley and the girl took, I suppose," he said.

"Yes."

"Clever fellow, Mellon," he went on, inconsequently. "An invaluable secretary, I should think."

"I dare say," I replied. "What the deuce are you driving at, Wilby? You tried him rather high, you know."

"Did I? Not so high as he's going to be tried, old thing," said Wilby.

I stared my wonder.

"No—I'll not explain what I mean now. I want to think it over. We'll have another re-

construction when we get back to your place. The secretary bird is one of the greatest ornithological curiosities, as you know, and must be studied carefully. And here's the wicket gate."

I protested against mystification, but uselessly. Wilby would explain nothing. He walked through the woodland very slowly, taking bearings as it seemed, looking before and behind and this way and that. So we came to the white gate and into the road. The wheel-marks of my car on the soft grass opposite were quite plain.

"This where the car stopped?" he asked. "Yes, I see. Let's walk about a bit on this patch of grass. Walk hard, Allison."

He set the example, walking to and fro over the wheel tracks, kicking the turf and obliterating the marks.

"I suppose," said I, "this is to smother the traces of my car? But for the life of me I can't make head or tail of it."

"Tell you by and by," said Wilby. "Let me alone now to puzzle it out."

He was silent during the rest of our walk home. After tea he sprang another surprise.

"Do you ever go to church?" he asked.

I was amazed to hear the same question that Mellon had asked me in the morning.

"Yes," I answered, "but not on Fridays, if that's what you mean."

It was Wilby's turn to be astonished.

"That's not what I mean, whatever you mean

yourself, Allison. I merely asked because my wife likes to go to church once on Sundays, and I thought we might go this evening."

"By all means," said I. "I don't often go in the evening. But it's a nice little church, and if the curate is preaching you needn't listen to the sermon."

"I won't," said Wilby. And he did not. The curate preached what I dare say was an excellent sermon, but Wilby sat with his blue eyes looking far away. I mention this visit to Woodbury Church only to show that Wilby was not merely a shrewd manufacturer and a fanatical golfer, but a thorough sentimentalist. He took me to church and kept me on tenterhooks till late in the evening simply because he knew my sister would be sitting in church pretending to listen to a sermon and thinking about him. I thought it was rather nice for my sister.

We got down to brass tacks immediately after supper, when we went to smoke in my study. Wilby filled his pipe and lit it, and sat down by my desk.

"Here's your telephone all handy, Allison," said he. "Now, ring up Lord Iscaster."

"What on earth for? I don't even know Lord Iscaster," I exclaimed.

"All the same, ring up. If you won't, let me ring him. I'll bet you any money I know what the answer will be."

"Are you serious?" I asked.

"Never more so."

It seemed a preposterous thing to do, but something in Wilby's manner caused me to do it. I took the directory, found Lord Iscaster's number, and put in the call.

"What am I to say?" I asked.

"Oh, merely ask if Lord Iscaster is at home. If so, you might say you rang to inquire whether Miss Darley was better as you heard she was indisposed on Friday."

"Absurd!" I cried.

"Never mind. Do it."

The ring came quickly.

"Is that Lord Iscaster's house? Is Lord Iscaster at home?"

"Who is asking?" was the reply over the wire.

"Mr. Allison, of Woodbury," I said.

"No, sir, Lord Iscaster is not at home. His lordship was taken ill yesterday and has been removed to a nursing home."

"Who is speaking?" said I.

"The butler, sir."

I requested him to hold the line a moment, put my hand over the transmitter, and told Wilby.

"I should have won my bet," said he. "Ask if he can tell you the address of the Nursing Home, that's all."

But the butler regretted that he could not tell me where Lord Iscaster had been taken, and as Miss Darley was away there was nobody to whom he could apply for information.

"There you are, Allison," said Wilby, when I had rung off. "What did I tell you yesterday?

Now we have them all accounted for: Bardolph is dead; Lord Iscaster has vanished into a mythical nursing home; Colonel Darley has disappeared; Edderley is somewhere in the North Atlantic; Cantlick is in France, or elsewhere; and Mellon is lying like a gas meter."

"Lying? How?"

"Anyhow. Not a word of the yarn he told the Coroner is true. Hardly a word he said to us this afternoon is true. Bardolph did not commit suicide. Bardolph was murdered. Four people knew it, if not five—I'm not sure about Edderley. But the other four certainly."

"Good heavens, Wilby! Do you know what you are saying? How can you know this? And do you realize what it means?"

To each of the questions I jumped out in breathless haste and horror, Wilby nodded.

"Look, Allison," said he. "When you heard that Bardolph was dead, what was your first conclusion? You thought he had been murdered. You were not quite sure, but you believed it possible that, in a moment of rage against Bardolph, Edderley might have shot him, or perhaps that he intended to shoot him and had prepared a get-away in advance. It was only when I showed you the paper at my house that you believed in a suicide."

Wilby had described my thoughts exactly, though he did not know all I knew about the events of the Friday night. He had not heard

that shot. He had not seen Edderley arrive at the white gate and pause there to listen and to look. He had not heard the hesitations and uncertainties in Edderley's story to me.

"I won't deny," said I, "that I had a momentary fear; but it soon passed away. When you come to think of it, Edderley had no motive whatever for killing Bardolph. He had married Miss Darley and had made arrangements to go away with her. Why should he kill Bardolph?"

"My dear chap, I'm not suggesting for a moment that he did. I can't possibly know whether he did or not."

"And I don't see how you can possibly know, either, that Bardolph did not kill himself."

"I'd reached that conclusion this morning. This afternoon I confirmed it beyond any shadow of doubt."

"This afternoon!" I cried. "When?"

"In the dining-room when Mellon 'reconstructed' for us. I can tell you what happened after the port had been brought in as certainly as if I had been there. There was a mortal quarrel between Bardolph and one of the others. They both shot at the same time. The other hit; Bardolph missed—and that is why he was found seated at the table with a revolver gripped in his hand instead of dropped to table or floor as it would have been if Bardolph had shot himself. What's more, Allison, here's the bullet that Bardolph fired."

I leaped out of my chair. Wilby was extracting something from his pocket-book—a small leaden bullet.

"Where—" I gasped.

"In the middle of a folio that stood on the second shelf from the top of the bookcase facing Bardolph's chair. It was an old copy of 'Hydriotaphia'—I'd never have credited Bardolph with a taste for that sort of thing: I suppose it was there when he bought the place. You remember that while Mellon was looking out at the window I wandered round? I saw a little hole bored into the back of that volume and thought it curious. I took it down, and found that the bullet had plowed into the body of the book and stayed there. I ought to have let it stay and tell its own story when the police got busy. But I remembered Edderley—"

"Wilby!" I exclaimed. "What have you done, and what are we doing?"

"At present I've done nothing except commit petty larceny of half an ounce of lead. What we have to consider, Allison, is whether we shall go on to compound felony."

"You mean—?"

"I mean it is up to us now to decide whether we shall tell the police this story and let them worm their way to the bottom of it or whether we shall let Bardolph be buried as a suicide and forgotten for the carrion he was."

# Chapter Thirteen

We did not settle the critical question that night. Wilby was inclined to think we ought to place it in official hands and wipe our own of it. But he said he would like to sleep on it, and suggested that I also should take counsel from the night. Rashness might bring fearful consequences to Edderley and to Katherine Darley. Also to do nothing at all might leave us with a nasty taste in our mouths for the rest of our lives.

One thing I asked Wilby. Was the discovery he had made merely accident, or had he any theory beforehand?

"Accident," said he. "My only theory beforehand was that there was something fishy and that Mellon was hiding it up. Afterwards, when, as you remember, I sat in Bardolph's seat, in my mind I played his part. Either Bardolph was a rank bad shot or his opposite number was standing and not seated at the end of the table, for the bullet must have passed there at the height of six feet. The folio was on a shelf nearly seven feet from the ground. I wonder a little whether Mellon has any suspicion of the discovery. But we shall know in time."

The night brought no counsel to me. Nor had Wilby reached a resolution. The morning papers

had full accounts of the inquest, but no suggestion that the verdict was anything but right. They were, as I have said, more occupied with the sensation Bardolph's death had made in the stock markets than with Bardolph himself.

Of course, they printed little notices of his life, so far as it was known—and that was not very far. Four or five years before, Bardolph did not exist for them. They also printed interviews with the Mr. John K. Pillar, who had been endeavoring to check the slump in Anglo-Iberian stock.

The great financier was inexpressibly shocked to hear of the death of Mr. Bardolph under such tragic circumstances, and thought that the event might have a disastrous effect on his efforts to save the Corporation. But it would be only a temporary effect, he believed. He knew that all the concerns in which the Anglo-Iberian was interested were perfectly sound and good, and the panic in the market could only be attributed to some underground influence which he could not understand. It seemed to have originated in America, he said, but when he left New York three weeks before there had been no sign of it. He was at the head of another group of Mexican interests but the suggestion that this combination was hostile to the Anglo-Iberian had no basis in fact. Indeed, a movement like this, which created a lack of public confidence in Mexican companies, was bad for all, and he had tried to stop it even at some considerable financial risk to himself.

"Tell the public," he said, "to keep up its confidence. I feel sure that within a very short time the stock will be back in its old position. I hear there is to be an extraordinary meeting of the Anglo-Iberian shareholders on Tuesday, and I shall attend and say this to the meeting if necessary. I had not the honor of Mr. Bardolph's acquaintance; I have the greatest respect for his financial and commercial genius. I want to quash the idea that there is any hostility between the group I represent and Mr. Bardolph's interests."

I read this out to Wilby at breakfast.

"It looks to me," said I, "as if Mr. John K. Pillar may have been the writer of the anonymous letters to Cantlick and Colonel Darley."

"Eh? What anonymous letters?" Wilby asked.

Then I remembered that I had told him nothing of that part of the matter.

"For a lawyer, Allison," said he, when I had roughly sketched the contents of the letters, "you certainly are the most casual person. Mr. John K. Pillar, if it is he, knew a great deal about events in the Anglo-Iberian market before they happened. I wonder . . . Do you think he was known to Lord Iscaster or Colonel Darley?"

"Haven't a notion, but I should say probably not."

"Or to Cantlick?"

"Cantlick spoke of him to me, but not as a man he knew."

"Or to Mellon? Eh—that's it! to Mellon. A

man of Mellon's type in the City would know everybody. I wonder—but it's no use wondering. Can you fix me up with a top hat and a black coat? We'll go to the funeral. I should like to see Mr. John K. Pillar. Meanwhile, what about a tramp, as there's no golf to-day?"

We walked along the road to Wood End and through the white gate and the woods to the golf course. Usually there were a couple or so going round, but to-day, probably because of Bardolph's death next door, so to speak, the place was deserted. Wilby and I sat behind a bunker out of the wind to smoke a cigarette.

"I wonder—" said he and paused. This was becoming a liturgy of his. "I wonder whether you have told me all about it, Allison? You are so casual. Let's count Edderley out. As you said, his chief motive for wishing Bardolph dead had gone. But somebody in that party shot Bardolph. There are four of them. Begin with Lord Iscaster? Any motive there?"

"I can't think of one. Of course, Lord Iscaster was very deep in Bardolph's wretched concern, and stood to lose a lot of money."

"But he must have known that killing Bardolph would not make his shares jump up; also, he was expecting to marry his daughter to Bardolph's millions. They were in the same boat—sink or swim together. The only thing against Lord Iscaster is that he has disappeared. But so have the rest. Let's put him on one side. Now—Colonel Darley?"

"Hated Bardolph like poison—"

I stopped. Should I tell Wilby what Colonel Darley had said to me that afternoon in my cottage?

"Well," said Wilby; "go on."

"He hated Bardolph because of the marriage scheme. He adored his niece. He told me last Thursday that rather than see Bardolph marry his niece, he'd shoot him."

"Ah!"

"But I'm sure Colonel Darley would never have murdered a man. It was a figure of speech. You know his type."

"Yes," said Wilby. "But I wonder whether he knew on Friday that it was impossible for Bardolph to marry Miss Darley, who was already Mrs. Edderley?"

"I'm pretty certain he didn't. Edderley took nobody into his confidence. The marriage was quite secret. But—good Lord!"

What Mellon had said yesterday morning suddenly occurred to me. I had promised him to tell Wilby no more than he knew already. But that discovery in the dining-room bookshelf certainly altered my relations with Mellon. If Wilby was right, Mellon had been lying to me.

"Yes," said Wilby, "what now?"

"I've just thought that the marriage could not have been absolutely secret, because Mellon heard of it on the telephone on Friday evening, and told Bardolph. In fact, that was the message which

he says made Bardolph send them into the billiard-room."

Wilby got up and threw his cigarette end away.

"My dear Allison," said he, "you are a wonderful ass! Here's the germ of the whole thing, and you either forget it or keep it locked up in your head."

I excused myself on the ground that Mellon had spoken under a pledge of privacy.

"Well—never mind. But you see what this means for Edderley? Bardolph challenges him. There's a row. They come to guns. Your friend Edderley got away with it just in time. He'd better stay away. And now we know why they've all disappeared—Lord Iscaster and the Colonel, to hope there will be no scandal, Cantlick out of sympathy for Edderley. Mellon remains. He has the secret, but for some reason is sworn to keep it. I wonder— Why is Mellon keeping it dark? He's a Bardolph man? Any little fact that will throw light on that?"

"Possibly," said I. "Cantlick told me that Mellon was, for some reason or other, bitterly opposed to the marriage of Bardolph with Katherine Darley. He even said to Cantlick that before such a marriage was allowed Bardolph ought to be shot."

Wilby looked a thousand reproaches at me, but merely sighed instead of expressing them.

"There's the whole thing complete," he said. "Everybody's accounted for, and the 'reconstruc-

tion' fits in with the facts, which is more than Mellon's does."

I glanced over my shoulder.

"Shall we be moving on?" I said.

"Yes, but admit that it's a good reconstruction," said Wilby.

## Chapter Fourteen

THEN the thing happened which I had foreseen when I looked over my shoulder.

"I thought it was a fine bunker," said a voice. "I beg your pardon, did you say it was lately reconstructed?"

Wilby and I were looking up to the tall man I had seen rounding the hillock. He was gray-headed, about fifty, spare, dark, keen-looking.

"Yes," said Wilby, "so my friend tells me: I'm a stranger. It blocks the third, but a good brassie shot will carry it. Interested in golf?"

"Yes, I take a great interest in golf," said the tall man. "Had no idea there was a course like this down here, though. Looks as if it cost a pretty penny. I guess the late Mr. Bardolph had something to say about it."

"No," said I. "The course was here before Mr. Bardolph came."

"Oh, you're a neighbor of Bardolph's? Very sad about his suicide, is it not?"

"Very," said I.

"Distressing," said Wilby.

"I came along to go to his funeral," said the tall man. "He was a friend of mine."

"Oh," we said together.

"Perhaps you can tell me whether I'm right

for Woodbury Manor this way. I have an introduction to Mr. Mellon, who, I believe, is arranging the funeral."

We showed him the path.

"I left my motor in the village," he said. "I like a walk, and I'm always interested in a golf course, as I said a while ago. Maybe as neighbors you'll be attending the funeral?"

"Oh, no," said Wilby, "we shall not be there."

The stranger saluted and walked off towards the house. Wilby and I went back through the wood.

"I wonder how much he heard," I remarked.

"I could kick myself!" was Wilby's reply. "Of course, he heard the whole thing. And when we were flitting, he came around to make sure who we were. Can we go by the churchyard on the way home?"

We walked through it, Wilby prospecting. The grave-digger was at work.

"I think, after all," he said, "we'll be present at the funeral. I have a fancy to see that gentleman and Mr. Mellon together."

He timed our arrival at the churchyard for some minutes after the meager procession from Woodbury Manor. Bardolph seemed to have no friends. Mellon, a City man or two, and the servants; some visitors, obviously journalists; a little group of villagers—these saw the mortal remains of Edward Bardolph put under ground.

Wilby's idea was to see the stranger and Mellon together without being seen. We viewed the

funeral from the shelter of a shrubbery near the wall of the churchyard. But Mellon looked into the grave alone with conventional decorum. The stranger was not there.

# PART II

# The Man in the Bowler Hat

# Chapter One

BARDOLPH was no sooner buried away out of sight than the public forgot him.

The newspapers showed quite plainly that the public did not worry a bit about the circumstances of Bardolph's death, or about what was happening to him now that he was dead. What concerned the public was the future of the Anglo-Iberian. All its interest centered upon the meeting of shareholders on the following day which Mr. John K. Pillar had promised to attend. John K. Pillar was seated on the throne from which Bardolph had fallen.

In the evening paper which Wilby and I conned after dinner, a tiny paragraph was devoted to the funeral of the millionaire: columns were filled with Anglo-Iberians. The stock had reached its lowest point about eleven in the morning. Then buying had begun—buying on a large scale, too—and the price rose steeply, went on rising till the official close of the markets, and continued to rise in the street outside. Good reports had suddenly begun to fly across the Atlantic. There was likely to be a boom in Mexican investments. Rumors arose of a possible merger of the interests of the John K. Pillar group with the Anglo-Iberian. Was it conceivable that the promised presence of Mr. Pillar at the meeting on Tues-

day indicated a substantial basis for the rumor? The City Editor thought it was and went on to enlarge on the prospect at great length.

The anonymous prophecy was coming true all the time: that was the significance of the news for us.

We had not yet solved our own problem. Bardolph was buried and half-forgotten already. Should we allow him to remain buried and become fully forgotten, or should we raise his ghost and fling it into the middle of this crowd of ghoulish money-grubbers?

I had abominated Bardolph and all he stood for. Wilby, a sturdy business man of the north who believed in making money but liked to make it cleanly in industry, held similar sentiments, though he expressed them with less violence.

Yet Bardolph, an undesirable as he was, had been killed, and I think, if Edderley and Cantlick had not been mixed up with this affair, we should have gone at once to the nearest police station and told what we knew. As it was we spent endless discussion on the question without coming to a decision.

Then about half-past nine in the evening something occurred very quietly which changed the whole world. About half-past nine, I, who had been on earth more than thirty years without ever having my pulse accelerated beyond a mere trifle by any woman, fell in love—went in "head first off the deep end," as Wilby said afterwards, fell finally, irrevocably, hopelessly in love with

the girl who passed through the doorway of my study just after the clock had struck half-past nine.

First, Mrs. Batting herself came in and said there was a lady to see me. What lady? She did not know. The lady gave no name, but said she had a letter which she must deliver personally to Mr. Allison. I said that the lady had better be shown in then. Mrs. Batting fetched her in.

She hesitated a moment in the doorway, and so I saw her framed, like a portrait, just as Miss Darley had been. For a fleeting instant I thought it was Miss Darley. They were alike in height and in coloring, and my visitor wore much the same sort of hat, a little bowl of felt into which her head was tucked. But when she came forward, looking from me to Wilby as if uncertain which was which, and stood an instant in the light from my table lamp, I saw that she was infinitely lovelier than Katherine Darley. She radiated charm in the same way, but she had extraordinary beauty as well as charm, a kind of chiseled beauty of feature almost unreal, and a grave stateliness which made her seem to be much taller than she actually was.

But all this was nothing. I had seen hundreds of beautiful women, and they had not disturbed my composure. It was as her gray eyes met mine (when she had determined that I was Allison) that the miracle happened. Some nameless, indescribable influence passed from them to me. My heart seemed to miss a beat. This woman's

eyes told me that she had need of me. From that instant I was her slave.

Probably not ten seconds had passed since she crossed the threshold. I glanced at Wilby to see what effect the vision had produced on him. He stared with the merest curiosity. Afterwards he told me that all he had seen was a good-looking girl coming into the room looking rather worried! But then, Wilby had experienced his miracle years before.

I think I just bowed and placed a chair. As she sat down I said:

"I'm Allison. You want to speak to me? This is Mr. Wilby."

I waited in a kind of frenzy for the sound of her voice. It was a low-toned voice, contralto if she had been singing, very soft and clear. She said:

"I'm afraid it's unpardonable to disturb you so late. But if you would be so good as to read this letter—"

She held out an envelope. I took it, opened it, excused myself, went to the table and read the letter under the light of the lamp. It was a note from Cantlick.

My dear Allison, [he wrote], You'll think I'm no end of a bore, but do this just to oblige me. The lady who bears this letter will not give it to you unless she is in very serious need of help. If she does, you will know that things have come to a crisis with her, and your advice as a lawyer and your assistance as a man will be of the greatest importance. She has no intimate friends in London, and as her trouble is intimately concerned with

a private matter of which you probably know something by this time, I confide her to you. I know you won't fail me. If any step you think it necessary to take costs money, don't hesitate; there will be plenty.

Ever yours,
R. C.

I found Cantlick's letter cryptic. I puzzled through it a second time without finding any hidden lights. Then Wilby said:

"I'm probably in the way, Allison. I'll go for a stroll."

"Don't go for a moment," I asked him, turning to the girl. "My friend, the writer of this letter, does not mention any names. You know what is in it?"

"Just roughly," said she. "I ought to have introduced myself." And she took from her bag a card and handed it to me: "Adelaide Mellon."

I had a nervous shock of surprise. Here was the explanation of Cantlick's remark about her intimate concern in an affair of which I knew.

"Mrs. Mellon—" I began.

"Oh, no," said she. "Miss Mellon. You know my brother? Yes, of course. Mr. Cantlick told me that he had lunched with you."

Relief succeeded my astonishment. It was immensely agreeable to me to know that she was not Mrs. Mellon.

"Of course," said I. "And I spent a great part of yesterday with him and Mr. Wilby. Mr. Wilby is my brother-in-law. He is in my confidence. I should like him to read Mr. Cantlick's letter, if you don't mind."

"Oh, not a bit," she said.

Wilby took the letter and read it.

"And," I asked her, "would it be unpleasant for you to say anything you have to say to both of us? I can guarantee Wilby's interest, and he knows as much as I do about the affair Mr. Cantlick mentions."

"It will be very kind if he will listen, too," Miss Mellon said.

"Cantlick," I went on, "speaks of some trouble in which you may need legal advice and personal help. I need hardly say that anything I can say or do—"

"Oh, you are so kind!" she exclaimed. "I know it must seem amazing that a stranger should burst in on you like this. But it was Mr. Cantlick's idea that you might help me if the need came. And it has come. . . . Perhaps if I begin at the beginning? I've been thinking how I can explain it to you. . . ."

"Yes," said I, "at the beginning, by all means." I liked her to be talking and looking so gravely at me straight in the eyes. "But let me give you a more comfortable chair. This one by the fire. And won't you take off your coat, or throw it back?"

## Chapter Two

THUS, seated in my chair with firelight for the background of her lovely profile, Adelaide Mellon told her story.

"I live in New York," she began.

"But," cried I, "you've not a trace of accent, Miss Mellon."

"Oh, no," she smiled. "Not an American. Our people are Devonshire people and I was born and began to be educated down there. But my father, about fifteen years ago, got an engineering appointment at Vera Cruz, and as my mother was dead he took my brother and myself out with him. He died there six years since, and after a while we shifted to New York, where I worked in an office. When my brother came back to England two years ago I stayed behind. We were not well off, and I had a good billet. It was only last April that he sent for me. . . ."

She paused and frowned as upon a distasteful recollection.

"I don't quite know how to get at the real trouble without rambling. But it was like this: Towards the end of his life, my father, who was a fine engineer but no business man and not a specially good judge of character, became entangled with some very unpleasant people. He got to

know at last that they were crooks, and I always think that worried him to his death. But before that, he was particularly intimate with a man named Balter, who had an oil scheme. My father was expert in oil mining, and Balter got him so interested that it was a long time before he realized that he was being asked to lend his name and reputation and skill to a wild-cat promotion. Balter was constantly at our place, and he began to make love to me."

I ground my teeth.

"I hated him," said Miss Mellon.

I stopped grinding my teeth.

"My brother Arnold hated him too. He was a man twice my own age, and not a gentleman—a shifty, crooked-minded man. My father saw nothing of his persecution of me, but it became horrible. So they went on with the oil scheme, and both my father and Arnold, who was on the business side of the concern, were sort of bogged in it—very deep. Then one of Balter's gang gave him away. He was arrested for some infringement of the Mexican mining laws and got a sentence of three years. Fortunately my father's name did not come out, but a few months afterwards Balter smuggled a letter out of prison to him in which he spoke of renewing their connection when his term was up, and urged my father to have some money ready—if not, well, so much the worse for him. You can well understand, Mr. Allison, how a letter like that worried an exhausted and sensitive man, who was al-

ready in low water, and it was one of the things that helped to kill him. He died of heart disease within a month.

"Arnold," she went on, after a pause, "got a post in New York, and we left Mexico, very glad to be clear of the country where we had done so badly. I was happy enough in New York and very busy. Two years ago Arnold was offered the secretaryship in London of one of Mr. Bardolph's companies, and came across. He did extraordinarily well, and when the Anglo-Iberian Corporation was formed, Mr. Bardolph appointed him secretary with a big salary—and, of course, he had lots of chances to make money. Being richer than he ever expected to be, he sent for me last April, and I threw up my job and came to live with him. He took a flat in Maida Vale, and I ran it for him and enjoyed a leisurely life in London. I suppose any girl would who'd been hard at work all her days. But I'm very sorry I ever came to England. . . ."

I suppose I must have looked my extreme disapproval of this statement, for she checked and laughed. And how delightful she was when she laughed!

"That's a funny thing to say to an Englishman I'm asking to help me," she added. "But it was a mistake. I found the suggestion that I should come and live with Arnold had been made by Mr. Bardolph. And Mr. Bardolph began to spend evenings at the flat in Maida Vale—in order to talk business with Arnold, he said, but

I soon discovered that he really came to make love to me. I seem to have a magnetic attraction for objectionable elderly men. . . ."

I did not like that word "elderly." I began to wonder whether the little frosting of the hair just over my ears was very noticeable. But it was delightful to hear her say "objectionable."

"How did Bardolph know anything about you, Miss Mellon?"

It was Wilby's voice—the first time he had put in a word. She looked at him with attention.

"A curious thing that you should have asked that question, Mr. Wilby," said she; "it's puzzled me no end. Of course, Arnold must have mentioned that he had a sister in New York, and perhaps it was natural that Mr. Bardolph should suggest having me over. But I had a kind of feeling that this was not all. I felt sure Mr. Bardolph knew of me apart from anything Arnold had said to him. I was certain of it from his manner. He seemed very far gone. The further he went the more I disliked him. But it never came to a danger-point. I suppose it might have done, for you can imagine what Mr. Bardolph's intentions were since he was paying court to Miss Darley at the same time. I didn't know anything about that, but Arnold did."

"Ah!" said Wilby.

"Yes. And as soon as he saw what Mr. Bardolph was doing at the Maida Vale flat, he got in a rage. He came home one evening and stormed at me. Like a man, wasn't it?"

"We are inconsequential creatures, Miss Mellon," said I. "But why on earth did your brother storm at you! He ought to have stormed at Bardolph."

"Oh, well, he'd done that already. What he said was this: 'What do you mean by encouraging that blighter Bardolph?' Of course, I said I had given him no encouragement and that I was grossly offended by his attentions—also that if Arnold had not been so blind to everything but business he would have seen what was going on. Brothers are blind, aren't they?"

Wilby laughed.

"There's one," he said, pointing at me, "as blind as a bat where his sister is concerned. I snatched her away from under his nose. But how did your brother get the idea that you'd been encouraging the nasty financier, Miss Mellon?"

"Oh, necessarily from Mr. Bardolph himself. Who else? That's the beastly part of it. When one day—it was not long ago—Mr. Bardolph mentioned to Arnold that he intended to marry Miss Darley, he said something about being afraid that I had some idea of him and hoped that I should not be upset. . . ."

"The infernal swine!" I cried.

She turned her gray eyes on me, looking very shocked.

"He's dead," said she.

"A good job for him that he is dead!" I ex-

claimed. She turned away and looked into the fire.

"I'm no good at telling a story," she said. "I've wandered into something that doesn't matter, and you have got in a temper about it."

I apologized with every abject circumstance.

"Oh," said Miss Mellon, "never mind. It was my fault, not yours. What really does matter is what happened last Friday."

Friday? That was the day of the dinner-party.

"Arnold was away—down here, of course. In the afternoon I left the flat and got on a bus to the Marble Arch and walked into Hyde Park. It was a fine afternoon and I strolled right down to Kensington Gardens and across to a point on the slope of the hill, where there's a lovely vista—a long avenue looking right down to Kensington Palace. I'd got fond of that view and often went there. It's a long way from the main roads and there were not many people about. I sat down on a bench. I hadn't been there a moment when a man came out from under the trees and sat down beside me. I immediately rose again and was going to walk away when he said:

" 'Stay where you are, Adelaide!'

"I turned and stared at him—a well-dressed man of middle-age, with something vaguely familiar about his appearance.

" 'Don't say you don't know me,' said he.

"And then I saw that it was Balter, older but infinitely smarter than he had been in the old

days. I drew away and pulled my coat around me. He seemed like an infection to me. I began to walk away from him. He just sat there and said:

" 'Stop, Adelaide, or you'll regret it, and your brother also!'

"Something in the words or his manner compelled me to stop. I stood facing him as he sat on the bench. Then he went on:

" 'I've no time to spare now. I have important work to do. I've wasted enough time following you from Maida Vale. You must give me an appointment for to-morrow—' Then he hesitated, and said: 'No, not to-morrow—say Tuesday. Here. This will do very well. Here at four o'clock on Tuesday.'

"I said I would do nothing of the sort. I did not want to see him again. If he molested me I would call the police.

" 'Very well," said he. 'Then you can say good-by to Arnold the next time you see him. I warn you. I've not forgotten Vera Cruz. I have not forgotten you. I always intended to marry you, Adelaide, and I mean to marry you very soon. Think it over. If you see Arnold to-morrow, ask him. I think he'll agree. I'm not going to follow you. You can stay here if you like. We'll just say *au revoir*. Next time we meet perhaps you won't be quite so stand-offish.'

"Then without waiting for me to say anything he got up and walked off among the trees. I was furious. But it was no use going after him or

denouncing him. He had spoiled my walk and I went back to the flat. Arnold was at Mr. Bardolph's house. I rang on the telephone and asked to speak to him. He was not in."

"What time was that?" I asked.

"Oh, I suppose between four or five."

"He was sitting outside in the garden here with us," I said.

"Well, I tried again two or three times in the evening, but the line was always engaged, and I could not get through. So I had to wait till the morning, when he would be back. Then this affair of the death of Mr. Bardolph happened and he did not come back. But on Saturday morning I had a ring from Mr. Cantlick."

"Good Lord!" Wilby and I uttered the cry together.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Miss Mellon.

"We thought Cantlick was—but never mind," said I. "Please go on, Miss Mellon. You knew Cantlick?"

"Just. I had been introduced to him one day when I was lunching out with Arnold, and last Thursday Arnold brought him home to lunch."

I remembered that Thursday was the day when Cantlick left me to go to Town and came back reporting the remark of Arnold Mellon that Bardolph ought to be shot before he married Miss Darley.

"Arnold and Mr. Cantlick were rather friendly," she added. "But I was surprised to

get the telephone message. He asked if he might come and see me, and half an hour afterwards he arrived in a taxi-cab. It was from Mr. Cantlick that I heard what had happened at the dinner-party on Friday night. There had been nothing about it in the morning papers. He said Arnold was obliged to stay at Woodbury Manor and had asked him to see me and explain. I inquired when Arnold would be back, and he said not till Monday or Tuesday. He seemed a little mysterious, as if there was something he wanted to say and he hardly knew how to say it. . . ."

"I think perhaps I can guess what it was he did ultimately say," Wilby remarked.

The gray eyes traveled to him, expressing astonishment.

"Was it not that if anybody asked you questions about the dinner-party or anything connected with it, you should know nothing?"

"Yes—something like that. But how did you guess? He said he was obliged to leave London for a few days, and neither he nor anybody knew quite what the sequel of Mr. Bardolph's suicide would be. He seemed to suggest that on that unknown sequel Arnold's conduct would depend. He made out that it was important that I should not be relying on Arnold for anything just at present, but he said that if I wanted help or advice he had a good friend who could be trusted. Of course, he meant you, Mr. Allison."

"I suppose so. Of course," said I, looking right into the gray eyes.

"Then," she continued, "I thought about the terrible man, Balter. If for any reason I could not rely on Arnold—and I thought for a minute or two, and I decided to tell Mr. Cantlick about Balter."

"Good, good!" said Wilby. "It was the finest thing—but I'm interrupting."

"Well, I told him. He was much disturbed. He said he wished he could remain in London to prevent me from being annoyed by Balter, but he absolutely could not. He had to get away within an hour. He suggested something about a boat train. At last he said that it might be all right and Arnold would be able to get back and deal with Balter. But if not, something else must be done. That was how and why he wrote the letter to you, Mr. Allison, and told me where to find you, and to go to you if I had reason to fear any more annoyance."

"And here you are," said I, "and so you must have found reason to fear?"

"Yes. I don't know whether it's a good reason. But I was really afraid. Those threats about Arnold—all the rest of it. Mr. Cantlick had asked me not to try to get into touch with Arnold, for his own sake. He said everything might blow over, but he wasn't sure. By Sunday night I had not heard. I was almost convinced that I had been alarmed for nothing. Then this morning I got a letter from Balter reminding me of the appointment for to-morrow. He said—but here it is. . . ."

A plain sheet, undated and unsigned, with the words:

Four o'clock you know where on Tuesday. Better not fail. Remember what I said. Be alone. If not, well, you know what I said.

"And so," Miss Mellon concluded, "after worrying about it all day, this evening I couldn't stand it any longer, and I brought Mr. Cantlick's letter to you."

## Chapter Three

It was all very strange and foggy, and as I listened, though a hundred theories came to mind, I could get no real light. But I blessed the fog that had brought this lovely apparition into my house. We were silent for a few moments. Then Wilby asked:

"How did you come down?"

"By train," said Miss Mellon.

"And from the station?"

"I walked. Mr. Cantlick had told me it was not far, and how to get here. I asked a porter to take my bag to the hotel. He said there was only an inn. I said I would stay there if I could not get a train back to London."

"You can't," said I. "The last goes at 9.50. And that inn—"

I looked at Wilby.

"The inn's impossible," said he.

"It seemed a nice clean place to me as I passed."

"I dare say," said Wilby. "But the inn's impossible if there's anything in Cantlick's suspicions. In fact, you've left too many tracks already, Miss Mellon. Tell me if there's anything in the bag—"

"Only my things."

"No papers—no address—nothing that would identify you?"

"Nothing at all. It's just a plain suitcase. I thought I'd better have it if I couldn't get back."

"Good!" said I. "Very good indeed. We'll consider the bag lost. And now, what are we going to do with you? You've got to be lost as well—isn't that what you have in mind, Wilby?"

"Exactly. If you have been thinking along my lines, Allison, you'll agree that Mr. Balter is not likely to find himself within reach of either Miss Mellon or her brother for a very long time."

"If ever," said I, fervently.

"And that it's up to us to lose her from this moment onwards, eh? And to do that—"

Wilby's speculations were interrupted by a long ring on the electric bell from the front door.

"Insistent," said Wilby. "Not quite usual at this time of night, is it?"

"Most unusual," said I, stepping into the hall. I intercepted Mrs. Batting on the way through, and brought her into the study.

"Mrs. Batting," said I, "before you answer that ring, take this young lady's things, show her up to your own room. Lock the door, and put the key in your pocket."

Miss Mellon looked from one to the other of us.

"Please!" said I, pleading. "A precaution. It may be necessary or not."

"Very well," she replied, "I'm in your hands."

She followed Mrs. Batting out of the room and

upstairs. While they were away, the ring was repeated even more insistently. We sat down one on each side of the fire and lit our pipes. Mrs. Batting came down at last and opened the front door. We heard her apologizing for delay, saying she had been away at the top of the house. A man's voice growled answers to her.

Then Mrs. Batting knocked and opened the door of the study. We looked up.

"Hullo, Sergeant!" said I. "What's up?"

Old Foker, the local sergeant of police, came into the room, taking off his cap as he advanced.

## Chapter Four

I AVOIDED Wilby's eyes as the sergeant came to me. It was better, until we knew his mission, not to permit him to see anything but the surprise his visit caused. But I thanked the instinct which had suddenly suggested that we should spirit Miss Mellon away before the door was opened.

Foker was a friendly person. I knew him quite well. We shook hands and I invited him to sit. He apologized for disturbing me so late in the evening.

"Anything private, Sergeant?" I asked, indicating Wilby. "This is Mr. Wilby, my brother-in-law."

Wilby grinned and nodded.

"What's he been up to, Sergeant?" said he.

"Oh," said Foker, disregarding the question, "nothing very private, I dare say. Mr. Wilby was with you this afternoon, I saw. It's about that. I called just to know whether you had seen Mr. Mellon since the funeral, Mr. Allison. In fact—I wondered whether he was here with you."

"No, Sergeant," I replied. "Haven't seen anything of him. He's not been here, and we haven't been out since tea."

"That's unfortunate," said the sergeant. "I very much wanted to see Mr. Mellon."

Foker looked deeply serious.

"What's up?" I asked again.

Foker scratched his head with the rim of his cap.

"Perhaps I ought not to say much, Mr. Allison. But you're a lawyer, sir, and you may be able to see daylight where I can't. I suppose I can speak confidentially?"

"I'll go out if you wish to see Mr. Allison privately, Sergeant," said Wilby.

"No," I observed, "sit tight, Wilby. You can see as far as anybody through a wall. Mr. Wilby will be quite confidential, Sergeant. He may even be useful, if it's a puzzle."

"Well then, sir," said the sergeant, "it's like this. About an hour ago I had a message on the phone from Scotland Yard. It was about the death of Mr. Bardolph. They said they had been told by some newspaper that the police and the coroner and everybody else had bungled the inquiry into the death of Mr. Bardolph, and that they were going to make a stunt of it in the morning, and that if Scotland Yard didn't already know there was something fishy about the case they'd better get busy."

"Whew!" said I. "Whatever can that mean? I thought it was all plain sailing—clear as daylight."

"Well, so I thought—and so I still think, or I did till half an hour ago," Sergeant Foker an-

swered. "But it appears that the newspaper has been nosing round for the people who were at the dinner-party on Friday—and, though it's none of their business, you know it's really very curious, Mr. Allison."

"What's curious?"

"Why, that they can't get hold of one of them! There was Lord Iscaster: he's not in London—said to be ill in a nursing-home. When they ask what nursing-home, they're told that nobody knows but Miss Darley, and Miss Darley can't be found. There was Colonel Darley, but he's gone out of Town and not told his man where. There was Major Edderley, and nobody knows where he is. There was a Mr. Cantlick, and his wife says that he left for the Continent on business on Saturday. The only other one was Mr. Mellon. Scotland Yard says to me: 'Get hold of Mellon and tell him we want to see him.' I say Mellon probably went back to London after the funeral, and they say he's not in London, but at Woodbury Manor. I go to Woodbury Manor and I learn that Mr. Mellon is not there. Everybody thought he was. He had some business to clear up after he got back from the funeral. Then he went to his room. He had dinner at half-past seven and went to his room again. And he's not there now, and nobody has seen him since. All his things seem to be there. I thought he had, perhaps, come over to see you. That's why I called. What do you make of it, Mr. Allison?"

"Why," said I, "it seems very strange, but I expect it all has a natural explanation, Sergeant. Mellon may have gone out for a walk and be back at Woodbury Manor by this time. Or he may have been called suddenly to London and gone by the 9.50."

"Nobody went by the 9.50," said the sergeant. "I rang up the station from Woodbury Manor. There wasn't a passenger on the place for that train."

"Then he's probably gone to walk off the worry of the last few days."

"Of course, there's that. But what about the others, Mr. Allison?"

"I expect you'll find, Mr. Foker, that this is a mere newspaper sensation, and everybody will turn up greatly surprised to find he's been missing. Wish I could help you to a theory. But I can't see anything in it, can you, Wilby?"

"Nothing at all," said Wilby. "But then, I'm not a detective. If Scotland Yard has any doubts won't it have somebody down pretty quick, Sergeant?"

"You bet," said Foker. "In fact, they're sending down right away if I can't give them any news. When I tell them that Mellon is missing, too, there'll be a man on the road in a brace of shakes."

"Oh," said I, putting commiseration in my tone. "That's a bit rough on you, isn't it?"

"No, Mr. Allison. They wouldn't do it without consulting our feelings, and if there's some-

thing they can find out that I can't—well, it's up to them."

I did some pretty quick thinking.

"Have a drink, Sergeant?" said I. "I was just going to order something for Mr. Wilby. He's leaving"—I looked at my watch—"in about half an hour, and has a long way to go. I'll see about it. You'd better get your things together, Wilby," I added. "I'll go and speak to Mrs. Batting. Excuse us a moment, Sergeant."

Wilby got up and left the room with me.

"What's the idea?" he whispered when we reached the hall.

I pointed up the stairs.

"Hull," said I. "Margaret won't mind. Are you game?"

He nodded.

"I'll send Mrs. Batting for Fenstock, and you can get away as soon as we've disposed of Foker. We'll have her out of harm's way before Scotland Yard begins."

Wilby went up to his room. I found Mrs. Batting, impressed secrecy upon her, instructed her to get hold of Fenstock and tell him he was to be ready to start at midnight to take Mr. Wilby home. Then I fetched a decanter and a siphon from the dining-room and returned to refresh Sergeant Foker.

The sergeant said "When," and drank to my health.

"There was," said he, "a young lady arrived by the 8.50 from Town and spoke of staying at

the hotel. She left her bag at the station and she hasn't been there since. I've been wondering whether Mr. Mellon—"

"Ho, ho! Sergeant!" said I. "Well, you know—you never can tell, can you? Perhaps that's the secret after all, and Scotland Yard will find a comic sort of mare's nest when it gets to work. Let's hope so. I should keep an eye open for that young lady, if I were you. Look for the woman, as the Frenchmen say."

"You really think—"

Sergeant Foker did not complete his question, but he seemed relieved by the notion that after all you never did know. And in five minutes he was on the way to his office to communicate with the C.I.D.

As soon as he had gone I asked Mrs. Batting to release the young lady from her room and to beg her to come and speak to me in the study. In spite of her anxiety, Miss Mellon was bubbling with merriment when she came down.

"Your visitor stayed long," she said. "What a thrilling adventure! Who was he?"

"My dear Miss Mellon," I answered, "it was a good thing I thought of shutting you up."

I told her broadly what had happened. When she learned that the visitor was a police officer, her smile faded out, her eyebrows went up and her gray eyes became dark and solemn. When I sketched for her the shape of the sergeant's inquiries, she was astonished, and when I reached

the point at which her brother had vanished, she was horrified.

I begged her not to worry. She must have gathered from what Cantlick said that there was some mystery which would no doubt be cleared up in time but involved present secrecy. Her brother was a man of the world, quite capable of taking care of himself. And so on.

"Now," I said, "Cantlick told you to be guided by my advice. Will you? I'm sure the best thing for you to do in the interests of your brother is to keep out of this affair of Bardolph altogether—to know nothing about it. The sergeant has gone away with the idea that you're some young person who had an assignation with Mr. Mellon. Not a very flattering idea for either of you. But let him have it; it will keep his mind off other things. And then, for your own sake, you want to keep out of the way of Balter. Those two points right?"

She assented.

"Well, I've ordered my man to be ready with the car immediately. Wilby and my sister live in Yorkshire, near Hull. I want you to let him take you home and lie low there until the sky clears. My sister is a perfect dear, and she'd do anything for me. Wilby is a thorough sportsman. Nobody here knows anything about him. Nobody will suspect that he has any connection with these affairs—at least—"

I suddenly thought with an unpleasant little

twinge of the stranger on the golf links; but it was useless to repine too much.

"No—I think nobody knows of him. At his place you will be quite safe and private and I can communicate with you through him without danger. What about it, Miss Mellon?"

"It's incredibly good of you," she said. "I have no right—"

"Yes, you have!" I exclaimed. "The best of all rights. Nothing will make me happier."

She looked at me in a startled fashion, and then turned away to look into the fire.

"Mr. Allison," said she, "are you a friend of Arnold's?"

I did not understand for a moment.

"I can hardly claim that," said I. "I've only met him three times, I think. Just an acquaintance. . . ."

Then she looked at me again, with immense trouble in her eyes.

"What an ass you must think me!" I declared. "Of course, Miss Mellon, I am a friend of your brother's. Cantlick commended you to me—that's enough. If I can do anything to help your brother—if he should want help, then I will."

She said nothing, but held out her hand to me. I grasped it with a sensation of rapture which was rudely interrupted by Wilby's entrance.

"Hullo!" said he. "Got rid of the Force? Hooray! Put Miss Mellon wise? I see you have. You've got to put up with me for about ten hours, Miss Mellon. Then I'll hand you over

to Margaret, which is better. Told Mrs. Batting to bring sandwiches quick and fill some thermos flasks. Just seen Fenstock. Like an old war-horse scenting battle. Nothing he likes better than scorching the country at night. My dear Allison, what you do let your friends in for!"

Wilby's burst of high spirits came timely. We were eating sandwiches and drinking coffee when Fenstock appeared.

"Two minutes to twelve, sir. Shall I bring the car round?"

"Yes, Fenstock. And plenty of rugs." He went off. "You've no things, Miss Mellon, but we'll wrap you up well for the journey, and Margaret will be able to supply you with everything you want. By the way, you'd better not be Miss Mellon up there, eh? What can we call you till we've settled Balter's hash and dragged the whole thing straight?"

"Why not let her be a relative of yours and call herself Allison?" asked Wilby.

My face flushed. I could have kicked Wilby. But I said:

"A splendid idea! That is, if Miss Mellon agrees?"

She looked at us in turn. I could not make out whether she saw the color that made me feel so hot.

"If you think so," she said. "I hardly know where I am or what I'm doing. I suppose it's all true, and I shall have a chance of thanking you some day."

"You will," I answered, "if you think so."

The imperturbable Fenstock again: "It's past twelve, sir."

I helped Miss Mellon into the big coat that Mrs. Batting had brought. We all went out.

"Avoid the towns, Fenstock," said I. "Get as far as you can before daylight."

We tucked Miss Mellon into the back of the car with rugs, cushions, and wraps. Wilby said: "Are you comfortable, sister?" dug me in the ribs, and got in beside Fenstock.

"At Mr. Wilby's orders, Fenstock," said I. "I shan't want you."

"Yes, sir," said Fenstock, and they were off.

It was a miracle. I could not help thinking of it as a miracle. This rotten business of Bardolph had brought into my house the one woman I had never expected to see there—the woman who proved to me that love at first sight was not an invention of the romancers. You really could fall in love at first sight. In a fraction of a second you could decide that one woman was raised in ineffable superiority over all the other women in the world, that this was the woman, that you were her slave, and that there was no heroism and no absurdity you could not attempt if she asked you.

I sat for an hour in the room where the miracle had happened, gazing at the chair in which the miraculous woman had sat, conjuring up her form and features, recalling the tones of her voice and the words she had said.

She was about twenty-five. I pieced out that from her appearance and the little account of her life she had given. I felt rather glad she was not younger than twenty-five because of those few gray hairs above my ears. She was very lovely. She was called Adelaide. . . .

And she was Mellon's sister! Well, that was a drawback, because I had not been able to make up my mind about Mellon. But, anyhow, she could not help having a brother—

# Chapter Five

In spite of all the soul-stirring events of that evening, I slept very well. I woke at seven with an unaccustomed sense of well-being. . . . At seven Fenstock would be, let me see, perhaps somewhere in the flats of Lincolnshire flying along the Great North Road towards the Humber. I lay following the car until eight, when I thought he must be getting near Goole. Then I got out and at half-past I went whistling down to breakfast.

Mrs. Batting looked at me with some surprise. I did not commonly whistle much before breakfast. She met me in the hall.

"He wouldn't let me disturb you, sir," said she, "but Sergeant Foker is here."

I stopped whistling and came down to earth. Sergeant Foker was in my study and with him was a gentleman, whom he introduced to me as a detective officer from London. I shook hands with both of them.

"Any news?" I asked the sergeant.

"Hardly any, sir. We came to see if you had some."

"None," said I. "Seen nobody since you left last night, Sergeant. Wilby started off home soon after, and I went to bed. Will you both join me at breakfast?"

It seemed that they had already broken their fast, but in order that my hunger should be appeased at once they would sit with me and take a cup of coffee.

"You haven't seen the paper, Mr. Allison?" Sergeant Foker asked, mentioning the journal whose news-editor had attacked Scotland Yard last night. He pulled it out of his pocket and passed it to me. That news-editor had been as good as his word. His paper flared with sensational suggestions and had a pimply rash of headlines emphasizing them: Mystery. Inexcusable Levity of Authority. Inexplicable Slackness of Coroner. Deep Suspicion. Disappearance of all the Guests at the Dinner-party. Supineness of Scotland Yard. Inanity of Local Police. All these themes were the subject of hectic discourse.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said the sergeant, as I looked up from the sheet. I glanced at the officer from Scotland Yard. His eyes had evidently been fixed on me, for he turned away suddenly.

"Very pretty indeed, Sergeant," said I. And I said no more because I did not feel sure how the officer from Scotland Yard was taking it. There was a feeling in my bones that presently I might have to be measuring my wits against this sleepy-looking person.

Now, I thoroughly disliked the presence of Scotland Yard in my house; the longer he stayed the more thoroughly. Foker was familiar with me and would not look for symptoms in my face,

speech, or conduct. I was quite certain, however, that Scotland Yard would notice everything, and that if by as much as the twinkle of an eyelid I betrayed knowledge where I was supposed to be ignorant he would be on my trail instantly. The short talk over my breakfast-table was therefore a mighty strain.

"I'm very glad," said Sergeant Foker, "that the Yard has sent down Mr. Pierce, for upon my life I can't make out what all the fuss is about. There never seemed to be a clearer case—plain as a pikestaff. I shouldn't have given another thought to it if it hadn't been for Mr. Mellon going off. Now that's funny. You've no word of him, Mr. Allison?"

"Not a syllable," said I. "You know, Sergeant, I was the merest acquaintance. I'd never seen him till last week. So it's not strange that I've heard nothing. I expect he went back to London."

"But he didn't—at least, so far as we can tell. Mr. Pierce had a message from the Yard half an hour ago. They've been keeping watch in Maida Vale, and he's not been there for the night."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, and went on with my breakfast.

Clearly all this palaver of the excellent Foker had nothing to do with the real object of this matutinal visit. So far Mr. Pierce of Scotland Yard had not said a word. I waited patiently for him to speak. I even guessed what he was going to say, and I guessed that he would be

looking hard at me when he said it. At last it came.

"The young lady seems to have been spirited away very successfully, too," said Mr. Pierce.

I think I acted my part of the nincompoop very well. I paused with the coffee cup in my hand.

"Young lady?" said I. "What young lady?"

"Miss Mellon," said Mr. Pierce.

"Oh!" said I. "Is there a Miss Mellon? Daughter? But, no—he's hardly old enough. Sister, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Foker.

I happened to be looking at Mr. Pierce at the moment and saw with an inward grin the glance of annoyance he gave to the sergeant. But dear old Foker was quite oblivious. He blundered on:

"Yes, sir—the young lady I mentioned to you last night. You know you thought it might be—Well, it wasn't. Mr. Pierce says undoubtedly she was Mr. Mellon's sister, who lived with him in Maida Vale. She must have come down by arrangement with him; but we can find out nothing about her. After she left her bag at the station she simply melted away. Didn't go by train. Wasn't seen by anybody—except that there's a vague story from Blight, the grocer's errand boy, that he thinks he saw a young lady turn up your lane from the corner of the road last night. We wondered—"

"If that was Mr. Mellon's sister, she might have come this way going to Woodbury Manor to see him, mightn't she?" I interrupted.

"Well—yes, and we wondered whether she had been noticed by your servants, Mr. Allison."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "that's an idea. Pity Fenstock's gone off—he's the most likely one. But we'll ask Mrs. Batting if she's heard anything."

I rang the bell, and Mrs. Batting came in. There had been a chance that she would send the maid, but I rather relied on Mrs. Batting's perspicacity, and she justified me by answering the ring herself.

"Oh, Mrs. Batting," said I, "these gentlemen want to ask you a question."

"Certainly, sir," she curtsied.

She listened gravely to Foker's question, looking like a rather elderly owl.

Of course she had seen no young lady in the neighborhood last night. She had not been outside the door. Nor had anybody else spoken to her of a young lady. But then there was nothing unusual in seeing a young lady walking along the road, and they would not be likely to have said anything to her. She would go and ask Annie.

"No," said Mr. Pierce. "Let me ring for her."

Mrs. Batting bridled at his confounded impertinence and looked to me. There was in her expression something which told me all was well. I answered the look by touching the bell myself. Mr. Pierce was certainly the very outside edge of insolence, but he should see that we were a

match for him. Foker looked on at the triangular comedy without understanding it a bit.

Admirable Mrs. Batting! She had left nothing to chance. Annie, the maid, when she came in and was questioned, looked even more owlish than her mistress, if that were possible. So far as she was concerned, she seemed never to have seen a young lady in her life and to be almost ignorant of the existence of the species.

"So you see," said I, when they had gone, "though it is very likely that the young lady passed here on her way to Woodbury Manor, nobody in the house noticed her."

"Except Fenstock, the chauffeur," said Mr. Pierce.

"Eh?" I exclaimed. "How do you mean?"

"I mean, he may have seen her, only he's not here to tell us."

"Oh!" said I. "Yes, of course, there's that."

I could not help admiring Mr. Pierce. He certainly was astute. But I thought him rasher than he might have been, whatever suspicions he had —and, of course, he oozed suspicion—to put me on my guard as he did.

I drank the last of my coffee, hunted for cigarettes, and speculated on the probable time of Mr. Pierce's departure. But he had not done yet. Having thanked me for a cigarette, he said:

"I understand, Mr. Allison, that you are a close friend of Major Edderley—in the same profession and all that."

Here was a new hare and a trickier one than the last. My respect for Mr. Pierce grew. My wariness doubled.

"Yes," I said. "I know Edderley very well, but I don't see so much of him as I used to. I don't practice any more, and I'm not much in London."

"I suppose you saw him while he was staying at Woodbury Manor last week," Mr. Pierce remarked.

"Yes, he came over once or twice for a chat. In fact," said I, as though I had just thought of it, "he was here a day or two before the dinner-party."

"And the Honorable Katherine Darley was with him," said Mr. Pierce.

"Yes," said I, "Miss Darley was with him. But how did you know that?"

This was a facer for the clever little devil, because being my guest and in the midst of a friendly conversation he had to tell me or to risk putting me on the *qui vive*. He did the only thing.

"Naturally," said he, "I've been making a few inquiries about the people who were at Mr. Bardolph's dinner-party—"

"So you really think," said I, "there's something in what the paper says?"

"No. I never think," said Mr. Pierce.

I gave him the laugh he was looking for.

"You were saying you made a few inquiries—"

"Yes, I've been at Woodbury Manor already this morning, and I learnt there that Miss Darley had accompanied Major Edderley on his visit to you last Wednesday."

I was on the point of asking who at Woodbury Manor knew anything about it, but refrained. Mr. Pierce should take the lead again.

"You didn't see Major Edderley after that?" I shook my head. "You knew, of course, that Miss Darley was about to be betrothed to Mr. Bardolph?"

"You don't say so!" I cried. "What a tragedy for her!"

"Yes," said Mr. Pierce, dryly. "It may be. But I suppose you knew that Major Edderley and Miss Darley were in love with each other?"

"Good Lord! What a complication, Mr. Pierce! No, of course Edderley is not the sort of man to discuss intimate things like that with anybody."

"Oh? Well, I just thought it might have been mentioned, as between friends. It seems to be pretty well known in London. You don't know Major Edderley's present address?"

"Yes, I do," said I. "His rooms are in Temple Gardens. Wait a minute: I'll give you the number," and I turned as if to go to my study.

Mr. Pierce smiled wanly.

"Don't trouble. I know that address. Major Edderley's not there, as the newspaper tells you. I meant—you don't know where he is now?"

"Haven't a ghostly," said I. "But look here, Mr. Pierce—you surely don't mean to suspect—well, you don't suggest that Edderley—"

"I never suggest," said Mr. Pierce.

# Chapter Six

THAT Tuesday, inaugurated by a sparring match between Mr. Pierce and myself, proved to be a day of tempestuous excitements, though it was not till several hours after Sergeant Foker had taken him away that I began to share in them.

First, the scare raised by the newspaper had created a tremendous stir in London, and the extraordinary meeting of the shareholders in the Anglo-Iberian Corporation produced something like a riot. It had been called at the Cannon Street Hotel, and the place was besieged an hour before noon by a mob of thousands of curiosity-mongers. They filled the station yard and overflowed into the street, and very few shareholders could present their credentials. The early afternoon papers added to the general distraction when they announced that the meeting had formally adjourned because the secretary of the Corporation, in whose name it had been called, had been unable to get into the hotel, and Mr. John K. Pillar, who had declared that he was to be present, had also been held up. Later on, they reported that Mr. Pillar was still at the Grand Palace Hotel, but refused to see interviewers. His secretaries told inquirers that he

would probably make an announcement about Anglo-Iberians next day.

In the quietude of Woodbury, I heard none of this. When my early visitors had gone, I shut myself up in the study to do some thinking, to put myself in the place of Mr. Pierce, to judge what I should do if I were Mr. Pierce and in possession of just the quantity of light on these strange matters that Mr. Pierce possessed. I came to the conclusion that I should do two things:

First I should keep a very careful eye on Mr. Allison; in fact, I should not let Mr. Allison out of my sight.

Next, I should be very curious about the dining-room at Woodbury Manor, and I should explore the evidence which had been given at the inquest in order to see what evidence had not been given.

I had no doubt that whatever else Mr. Pierce would do or omit, these two things would be done. Whether, without the advantage of Mellon's presence (which Wilby had), he would discover at Woodbury Manor what Wilby discovered, I could not decide. But his watch on me would be keen, and it was going to make things difficult.

In one respect, Mr. Pierce and I would be on level terms even if he did repeat Wilby's discovery. Neither of us knew who had shot Bardolph.

Thereupon I had a moral disputation with myself.

Whoever had shot Bardolph, was it not right that he should be brought to justice? I was a lawyer and a law-abiding citizen. If anybody had told me a fortnight before that I should even try to conceal a crime, I should have been amused, or scornful, or indignant, according to the circumstances. But I had to be honest with myself now. Possibly Edderley had shot Bardolph. It was alternatively possible that Mellon had shot Bardolph. I would not only not contribute to Edderley's capture but do anything in the world to prevent it. If it was Mellon— That girl now safe with my sister at Hull should never reproach me with bringing harm to her brother.

"If," I reflected, "I am an accessory after the fact—well, *Kismet*."

Safe at Hull. . . . But was it quite certain that she was safe at Hull?

A doubt suddenly struck me. Pierce was clever enough. If he had not been bamboozled by Mrs. Batting and Annie? If he suspected my relations with Mellon to be more intimate than I had said? Wilby's address was easily discovered. . . .

I got up from my seat in a hot flush, thinking of the telephone.

But was even the telephone safe? Pierce would have thought of the telephone, too. He would have a "listener-in" to every call put through from my house.

I sat down again. It was not so simple as that.

Some other way of warning Wilby must be found—if Wilby needed warning.

It soon appeared that Wilby had been doing some thinking also. He rang me up about half-past ten from his office.

"Hullo!" said I, "who's that?"

"Wilby. Just rang up to tell you I got through in time and have sent Fenstock right back."

"Half a moment," said I.

I wondered whether Mr. Pierce would be listening in himself. He might have asked to be warned of any call that came through for me. But on the whole it was improbable. If not I could risk something: the girls at the telephone exchanges would hardly see through this.

"I've found that quotation we were talking about last night," said I.

"Oh, what is it?" Wilby asked.

*"Gare les agents,"* I replied.

"Oh, thanks," said Wilby. "I thought it might be something like that. Now about the little picture I had to deliver this morning. I didn't do it."

"No—why?"

"It wasn't convenient. But the picture will be quite safe. We'll take care of it. Don't worry till you hear from me. I say, Allison, have you seen the paper? Our friend, Sergeant Foker, was right after all. Funny business, isn't it?"

"Yes," said I, "most mysterious. But I dare say it will all be cleared up. When shall I hear from you about that picture?"

"Oh, perhaps to-night, or to-morrow at latest."

"Righto! Give my love to Margaret. Good-by."

I fancied I could see Wilby's blue eyes with crinkles all round them. If anybody was listening to our talk he was welcome to what he could make of it. Wilby was good. He had thought quicker than I into the mental processes of Scotland Yard, and determined that his own house was not a safe refuge for Adelaide Mellon. When Fenstock got back I should know what he had arranged. "Perhaps to-night" could mean only that.

# Chapter Seven

"A LUCKY chance," says the poet, "oft decides the fate of monarchs as of lesser folk." It was a lucky chance that caused me to turn from the telephone to the window at that moment. In the next moment the man who was slowly walking by the garden gate and glanced at the house would have passed and I should not have seen him. I took no special notice of him at the time, but for some obscure reason his features remained in my mind, together with the fact that when I saw him I was thinking of Fenstock. "Remained in my mind" is hardly a correct account of the thing. I suppose the vision of a man's face seen through the gateway was subconsciously stored, to be dug out by some subsequent association of ideas.

I sat in my study most of the day, making up arrears of work, or rather trying to work—for I found my thoughts wandering every whip's while to Adelaide Mellon, and Wilby, and Fenstock on his way back from the north. I reckoned that if Fenstock had started from Hull before then, as he must have done, he would probably reach home by seven o'clock. But before seven o'clock came I had begun to take my share in the turmoil of that turbulent day.

Mrs. Batting brought in the evening paper about six. Its contents drove everything else out of my mind. They included excited accounts of the scene at the Cannon Street Hotel. But these were of small importance compared with the three pieces of news that flared across the front page with all the circumstance of the blackest headlines and the largest type. They were:

That investigators from Scotland Yard who had made inquiries at Woodbury Manor had formed the opinion that Mr. Bardolph did not commit suicide, but was shot by another person;

That the Honorable Katherine Darley, who was understood to be on the eve of contracting an alliance with Mr. Bardolph, was married by special license a few hours before Bardolph's death to Major James Edderley, who was one of the guests at the dinner-party;

That both Major Edderley and his wife had left Woodbury Manor on Friday night, that they were believed to have gone to the north of England, how or when the police would not explain, though they were in possession of certain clews; and that Scotland Yard was anxious that Major Edderley should report himself to the police wherever he was with the object of clearing up the suspicion that naturally attached to him in the circumstances.

I read the long stories, which I have condensed into these brief sentences, with a sensation of trembling excitement.

Pierce had been quick and certain. He had

evidently discovered the secret that the dining-room bookcase at Woodbury Manor contained, or got at the facts in some other way. The marriage of Edderley and Miss Darley it was impossible to conceal. Several people must have known of it, and the mention of their names in connection with the Bardolph affair could not fail to make some of those people talk.

But how had Pierce obtained the clew to Edderley's motor-journey to the north? That was the crucial question for me. I was positive that we had left no traces for the police, or anybody else, to follow. It was most unlikely that in the lonely district of Wood End we had been seen that night. We saw nobody. Nothing had been got out of my servants: I could stake my life on that.

The truth was (and this made the position so dangerous for me) that Pierce had deduced the clew from things actually known—my close friendship for Edderley, his visit to me with Miss Darley on the Wednesday, the fact that I did make a long motor-journey on Friday night and gave out that I had been to the north to see my sister at Hull.

If Edderley, for any reason, desired to lie perdu, or if for any reason he must, then he was now in the greatest peril. And I, who alone knew of his whereabouts, was hamstrung by the ingenuity of Mr. Pierce. That one little sleepy-eyed man should have done so much in less than twenty-four hours!

It was up to me now to play at diamond cut diamond with Mr. Pierce. How could I get at Edderley without putting Mr. Pierce on his track? The closeness of his investment of my citadel was shown within an hour. I had asked Mrs. Batting to bring dinner forward to seven o'clock and to show Fenstock in to me immediately he returned. He arrived while I was at the table, looking pale and hollow-eyed but full of suppressed excitement. I made him go and refresh himself with a wash before he talked, had a place laid for him opposite me, and fed him, refusing to listen to a word until he had dined.

"Now, Fenstock," I said, when he had lit a cigarette.

"First, sir, about the car. I hope you don't mind. I haven't brought it home!"

"Then how on earth did you get here?" I asked.

"I walked from the other side of Woodbury Manor Woods. I left the car in a linhay. There's a girl I know. It's her father's linhay."

"What went wrong with the car?"

"Nothing, sir. Running as sweet as oil."

"Then why in the name of—"

"It's like this, sir. I don't know whether I did right or wrong. But just as I was coming into Reigate I passes a fellow I know in another car, and he stops me. Driver for Colonel Goodfellow, he is, sir. Was his batman, but you wouldn't remember him. He says: 'Hullo, Fenny, what you been doin'?' I says, 'Driving a car. What's

up?' And he says, 'Police are after you. Had your name and number in at the police station. Fenstock in such and such a car, expected to pass so-and-so, to be held up and taken to Sergeant Foker at Woodbury immediately.' So I says: 'Ho, old Foker. What's he want, I wonder?' But I told the man he needn't go out of his way to say he seen me, and I misses Reigate and every other town and gets to Woodbury Woods without seeing so much as the button of a policeman. And then I thinks that old Foker may be lyin' in wait for me, and possibly he may be pokin' his nose where it ain't wanted; so I thinks of the girl and the linhay and I gets home without advertising myself—so even the fellow patrolling the lane don't know I'm home."

I listened to this recital with amused astonishment. Mr. Pierce had taken his first fall.

"Capital idea, Fenstock," said I. "We'll talk it over directly. But tell me what happened last night."

I tried to keep the hunger out of my voice.

"The young lady," said Fenstock, "had a very comfortable journey. She slept most of the way. Mr. Wilby is a very pleasant gentleman, sir."

"Yes, isn't he?" I said. "And the young lady—what did you do with her?"

"When we gets to Goole—it was about eight this morning—Mr. Wilby says: 'Fenstock, do you mind if we alter course ten points to port?' Not being nautical, sir, I didn't know what he meant, but I said I didn't mind. So under his

direction we took off to the left, north-westward, more or less, and got to a little village about five-and-twenty miles on, where we stopped. The young lady was taken into a cottage and left with an old woman that Mr. Wilby called Nanny. He tells me afterwards she was his old nurse. He says he didn't think he would take the young lady to his house just now in case there should be any nosey-parkers about, and I was to tell you she'll be quite all right there so long as may be needed. I drives him to Hull, leaves him at his office, and he tells me to get along back as quick as the speed limit will allow—he's humorous, is Mr. Wilby—because you never know when you may be wanted."

"Splendid, Fenstock!" said I. "Now let me think."

Mr. Pierce, of course, did not know his Fenstock. Doubtless he thought he would get hold of just a chauffeur, whom he could bully or threaten into telling him all that happened on Friday night. But the very fact that Mr. Pierce was so eager to get hold of Fenstock showed how close he was to the truth. And his passive siege of my house was evidence of his determination not to let go what he unquestionably regarded as his strongest suit.

It had seemed impossible to get away without Pierce's knowledge on the mission which grew more urgent every hour. But Fenstock's horse-sense had made possible the impossible.

"Fenstock," I said, "you've been driving nearly

twenty hours. Do you think you could make it twenty-four?"

"Forty-eight, if you like, sir," said the brave fellow.

"I want to get across the Channel to-night. There's a boat from Southampton at midnight. How about it?"

"Simps, sir," said Fenstock. I believe he meant that it was simple.

"I don't want the man who's patrolling the lane to know I've left the house. I don't want him to know you're here. I don't want anybody to know where I'm going. And I want to send a telegram. How about all that?"

Fenstock thought.

"Annie can take the telegram. If it's not a very private telegram, sir, what about lettin' her speak to the man in the lane? He's sure to be curious about a telegram—"

"Good!" I exclaimed.

"And while he's nosey-parkering about the telegram, we can slip out through the garridge, and I know a way across the fields to the woods—it's really shorter than the road. I should think that's got it."

"It has, Fenstock. It's what the Americans call 'a cinch,' I think. Now, when we get to Southampton, I'm no longer Mr. Allison. I am, well, let us say Mr. Jones—Mr. Arthur Jones. If anything happens which you want to tell me before noon to-morrow, telegraph to A. Jones, Poste Restante, Paris. After that—nothing do-

ing, at any rate, for some days. As for you, get away from Southampton, but don't come here until you hear from me again. You can go west. It must be some big town—say Bristol. Yes, Bristol. Stay at any little hotel you like under the name of A. Smith. Call at the post office every day for telegrams or letters. Garage the car where it won't be noticed. Muck up the number plates if you like. Now, get a few things in a light case for me, and what you want for yourself, and I'll write the telegram."

I had thought at first of dispatching a telegram to Wilby which Mr. Pierce would, of course, intercept at the post office. There was just a chance of sending him off on a false chase. Fenstock's notion of killing two birds with one stone was much better. With the pen in my hand I rejected several ideas. One was a message containing the name of Edderley. But that would probably be too patent a blind for Mr. Pierce. I thought of one with Edderley's Christian name, such as: "Tell Jim to look out for news." Finally I decided that some jumble which would appear to be a cipher was the best form.

So when Fenstock came to tell me he had assembled the two bags in the garage, I called Annie and Mrs. Batting, and told them what we were doing. They undertook to be even more owlish than before whenever questions were asked. And Annie thought it might be quite possible to attract the attention of the man in the lane, to let him know without ostentation that she

was carrying a telegram, and to induce him to walk quite a good way towards the village before she allowed him to see it.

Whereupon I gave her the telegraph form addressed to Wilby and bearing the words: "Composition must be maintained at present quality. Allison."

I thought that might take Mr. Pierce away in the direction of Hull.

In five minutes Fenstock and I with a bag each were walking along the fields under hedges towards the dim mass of Woodbury Manor Woods on the skyline.

# Chapter Eight

FENSTOCK is one of those fortunate human beings who have escaped the worst penalty of civilization. His senses are as keen as a wild creature's. He sees and hears things that escape me altogether.

As we entered the Manor Woods through a gateway from the last field on the hillside, he touched my arm and gently urged me off the path and into the thicket.

"We're being followed, sir," he whispered. "Will you sit down here and wait for me? I'll lead him off the scent."

"Are you sure? I've got to catch that boat anyhow, Fenstock," said I, in a whisper also.

"That's all right, sir. Depend on me. I'll not let you miss it. Better not move from here till I come back."

Without more words, Fenstock left his bag and went off among the trees. I placed my case on the ground and sat on it. . . .

Fenstock was right. We were followed. I could not see two yards—all the light was from a hazy sky, and the ground was fairly covered with a growth of big straggling laurels under the taller trees. But Fenstock had not departed two minutes when I heard footsteps padding up to the

gateway. The gate must have been opened with great care, for there was not a sound of it. Then something rustled by along the forest path.

I waited, longing for a cigarette but afraid to light one. It was a windless night. I could hear leaves falling from trees, and little things scurrying about—rabbits, voles, mice, no doubt.

Fenstock was a long time away. At least, it seemed a long time to me. I could not see my watch. One loses touch with time in such conditions.

Fenstock, when he came back, said it was twenty minutes. It had felt like an hour.

"We'll keep round by the edge of the wood, sir, if you don't mind. I can't quite make it out."

When we were well away from the path and had struck into a grass drive where the going was easy, I learned what it was that Fenstock could not make out.

"I'm pretty certain," he said, "it was the little chap that was watching in the lane. But he wasn't following us, sir. He was on some affair of his own. I seen him go by. He wasn't looking for anybody. He was in a big hurry. You know the wood ain't very deep just there, so I thought I might as well see him off the premises, so to speak. And I wanted to make sure he wasn't on the way to my linhay."

"Ah!" said I. "Of course."

"So I follows him. And this is what I can't make out, sir. He turns off in the middle of the wood along that track leading to the keeper's cot-

tage which I thought was empty, as Mr. Bardolph had given all the keepers the sack. I follows him down and stands at the edge of the clearing. He goes right across to the cottage and knocks at the door. He's let in. And that's all there is to it. But the funny thing is that the person that lets him in is the chap that was second footman to Mr. Bardolph."

"I don't know any of the servants at Woodbury Manor," said I.

"No, sir; of course not. But I know the chap very well by sight. You couldn't mistake him, he's that tall—about six foot three, I should think. I'd like to have known what was going on in that cottage, but I couldn't leave you any longer, and the time's getting short if we're to go to Southampton."

This was a surprising thing. It threatened to upset some of my theories.

"You're sure it was the man in the lane?" I asked.

"As near as nothing, sir. Same build. Same sort of hat. Bowler hat. You don't see many bowler hats about the village."

"And you don't think he was trailing us?"

"Quite certain he wasn't. Making for that cottage as quick as he could—a regular lope. And the footman chap expected him, too—didn't keep him two ticks on the doorstep."

"And yet he's been keeping close watch on my house all day. And as soon as we leave he clears off. It doesn't seem to fit in, Fenstock."

"No, I know it don't, sir. But, if I might say so, I've been wondering whether seeing Annie's telegram had anything to do with it."

That was certainly a new light. But why should the sight of a telegram to Wilby in Hull bring Pierce's watcher to a keeper's cottage in the middle of the wood to interview a footman from Woodbury Manor? I pondered the question while we came out of the drive and reached the main road beyond Wood End, walked a few yards along it, and turned into a lane. I had not resolved it when Fenstock said:

"Here's my linhay."

It was a shed beside a farm laborer's cottage.

"I'd better tell the girl, sir," said Fenstock. "I won't be a minute."

He was as good as his word. I heard a woman's sharp voice and Fenstock's gruff one—three or four sentences, finishing:

"Get along with you! You're all alike!"

Then Fenstock came and opened the linhay door. There was the car. In another two minutes we were headed west for Southampton. And still I had not resolved the question.

Fenstock gobbled up the miles. Haslemere in less than an hour was forty per hour, and in hilly country. Petersfield twenty minutes later. Southampton in two hours from the start. We drove to the docks direct without stopping in the town.

And still I had not resolved the question. A

shadowy idea was forming in my mind. That was all.

"Fenstock," said I, "we'll cut out the Bristol trip. I've got a notion that somebody should keep an eye on the little man you saw this evening and the footman from Woodbury Manor. What about it, Fenstock?"

"Do you mean my eye, sir?"

"It's for you to say, Fenstock. I don't quite know how you can do it, but if you can—"

"On my head, sir."

"You understand that Sergeant Foker must not know you're about. And what's more important, a Mr. Pierce from Scotland Yard. I think it's possible that Mr. Pierce may know something about that footman. Now, they all think you've been away in the north and haven't come back. Can you leave them in that belief?"

Fenstock hadn't a particle of doubt that he could. I looked at Fenstock's excited eyes. They were the only symptom of excitement about him. To all other appearance he was a wooden-stiff chauffeur.

"You take a lot on trust from me, Fenstock," said I.

"Do I, sir? Perhaps it's natural."

"Can you do one thing more? Think of a way for me to get in touch if I should want you in a hurry?"

"You mean—to meet you anywhere with the car?"

"Yes, mainly that. Or anything else."

"I think so," said Fenstock, after a minute's deliberation. "A very good pal of mine keeps a pub at Godalming—Bill Burch, at the Grey Goose Inn. I'll fix it with him. You telegraph anything you want to Burch, Grey Goose Inn, Godalming, and that'll be all right. Only, if I might say so, sir, supposing you want me to meet you at a Channel Port, it might be as well to have a code in case of accidents."

"Admirable!" I said. "We'll have West Coast ports instead."

We worked it out, Fenstock in a greasy pocket-book and I on the back of an envelope: Bristol for Dover, Cardiff for Folkestone, Swansea for Newhaven, Milford for Southampton, Runcorn for Weymouth, Fleetwood for Plymouth.

Then I wished Fenstock good-by, and told him to take care of himself.

"Very good, sir," said he, and drove off as I turned to find the booking-office and arrange for a berth on the steamer, if by chance there was one vacant. I booked through to Paris.

# Chapter Nine

At Havre in the morning I had not yet resolved that question of Pierce and the footman and the man in the bowler hat. In fact, I slept so well that there had not been much time to think about it. I found my seat in the train, ordered breakfast, and paced the platform waiting for the departure.

I had taken three turns when I received a shock that caused my every nerve to prick. My name was being shouted down the platform. It had been Frenchified—the accent pushed on, and a nasal ending. It sounded something like "Aleessong." But there was no doubt about it. A man in a blouse with a peaked cap on his head was walking down the train flourishing a telegram in a blue envelope in his hand and yelling at each window for Monsieur Aleessong.

Suddenly there came into my mind what I had said to Wilby—"Beware of the police!" For an instant I had thought of Fenstock—but I had told Fenstock I was to be Mr. Arthur Jones. Fenstock was ruled out. It might be Wilby—but how had Wilby learned of my journey, unless from Fenstock? And Fenstock would hardly have dared—and if he had dared he would have told Wilby my *nom de guerre*. Yet I wanted to

see that telegram. All this in a flash as the man came towards me.

And in a flash I stopped him. My French was not the best, but I could make it comprehensible if I tried hard.

"A telegram for Mr. Allison?" said I.

"Yes, monsieur. Are you Mr. Allison?"

"No," I replied. "I'm Mr. Arthur Jones, but I know a Mr. Allison very well. Mr. Allison of Bristol. An intimate friend. I have not seen him on the boat or on the train. If I might look?"

The *facteur* seemed a little doubtful, but he showed me the envelope. It was addressed: "Allison, Boat Train, Havre."

"I could perhaps help you if I read it," said I, making a desperate plunge. The *facteur* seemed rather bored with Mr. Allison, and he might think this a way out. I literally persuaded the envelope out of his hand, and, once I had it, opened it and took in its contents at a glance:

From Hull, 6 a.m. To Allison, Boat Train, Havre.—Composition gone wrong. Must see you. Flying over. Meet me St. Lazare station under clock in great hall noon to-day.

I folded up the telegram, put it back in the envelope, and handed it to the *facteur*.

"Pardon," I said. "I know nothing of it. It must be another Mr. Allison."

Five francs were nothing at the rate of exchange prevailing, but they were evidently more

than the hard-working man had expected to get for his labor of the morning. He said: *"Merc' bien, monsieur,"* put the thing in his wallet, and marched away shouting no more. I took my seat, and in due course was called to breakfast.

This was quite obviously Mr. Pierce being clever. Wilby had had nothing to do with the telegram, for he was quite ignorant of my intention to go to Paris. Nobody knew of it save Fenstock—and Mr. Pierce. How Mr. Pierce had divined it or got hold of it I could not imagine then. But the telegram showed me two things:

Mr. Pierce had decided that a telegram from Wilby in reply to mine was a natural sequence, and he had telephoned to the police at Hull to send it; Mr. Pierce was determined that where I went he or somebody on his behalf should go, too.

It was veritably diamond cut diamond. I had two days to do the thing I wanted to do and a considerable part of Europe to cross. I did not mean to be followed by Mr. Pierce's representative, however fast he might fly. How to evade him must be my study on the way to Paris.

Tempting as it was to speculate about the picture which Wilby was guarding, I must dismiss that from my mind and concentrate on the business of conveying a warning to Edderley. The *Andalusian,* on her leisurely way south, was due at Lisbon on Thursday evening and would sail again on Friday evening. Edderley would be

quite unaware of what had happened since he sailed, and, if he picked up news at Lisbon, might be tempted to do something rash—such as telegraphing to me.

If I could reach Lisbon by Thursday night—

The program had been clear in my mind before Mr. Pierce butted in. Now, if I was not very careful I should be dragging a detective with me, to the undoing of Edderley.

I came to my conclusion after half an hour of unseeing gazing at the flying landscape. The train would stop at Mantes, and Mr. Arthur Jones would alight from it there, so that Mr. Pierce's emissary might arrive in the grand hall at St. Lazare at noon and find nobody awaiting him. In the meantime, Mr. Arthur Jones would be on his way south in the fastest car he could get with the most reckless driver Mantes could produce, and if he reached Orleans in front of the Bordeaux express, he would keep in front of it—even as far as Bordeaux, if necessary. He reckoned that he might be in Bordeaux, with luck, by ten o'clock that night, and that he might then hope to reach Lisbon by Thursday night or Friday morning with Mr. Pierce none the wiser.

It was very hard going. The garage at Mantes was not particularly well equipped, for Mantes is a small town. It had one fast car, but an open car—and Monsieur might not care about a long journey without protection from the weather.

Monsieur, however, asked only to be provided

with car, driver, and rugs. He mentioned Orleans as his destination, trusting to luck and bribery to get the driver to go on if need were. The youth at the wheel in his turn, as it happened, asked only to be allowed to scorch to his heart's delight and the terror of all travelers. His driving would have staggered even Fenstock. With my life and his own in his thin brown hands, he kept ahead of the P. and O. express the whole way to Bordeaux. If I had given him a fortune I could not have pleased him better than by requiring him to go on and on, and faster and faster. I suppose it was over 350 miles to Bordeaux. We had started from Mantes at ten o'clock; we were in Bordeaux by six! We actually caught up the morning train from Paris to Bayonne. I was able to settle with the Fury at the helm, book on to Bayonne, and catch up two hours from the skirts of chance.

Thereafter it was a question only of trains, which in the part of the world lying south of the Pyrenees will not be hurried. I got out at the Central Station at Lisbon at midnight on Thursday. There had been two argumentations about the visés on my passport, which was more than a year old and had been at the bottom of a drawer most of the time. But it is wonderful to see what can be done by a little lying, a little willful misunderstanding, and a good deal of Treasury paper. The English pound note at that time would buy 95 Portuguese dollars.

# Chapter Ten

I HAD been in Lisbon only once before, but recalled enough of it to be able to pick up my bag and find my own way to the hotel in the Rocio Square not far away. The great city was in full feather at midnight, with vast crowds in the Square, every café buzzing with customers, and strings of cars waiting for the theaters to discharge their audiences half an hour later. The square seemed full of light and bustle and noise. But I knew that if I went down to the docks on the Tagus I should find stillness and silence. The *Andalusian* would be tied up to her berth, with a couple of Portuguese sentries at her gangway, and everybody on board would be asleep.

So Senhor Jones of London entered his name in the hotel book—the need for producing a passport having gone—and slept with one eye open until six in the morning, when he was called according to his orders, took a cup of coffee, paid his bill and carried his bag out into Lisbon.

The universal vehicle of Lisbon is the tramcar. The taxi seems hardly to be known and the omnibus not to exist. But the tramcars run everywhere—hundreds of little toy things on a two-foot gauge. Last night all Lisbon had seemed to be in Don Pedro's Square under the

electric lights. This morning all Lisbon seemed to be traveling on tramcars down towards the river, through the noble gateway leading into the Praça do Commercio, and it was one of these that I boarded to reach the Apollonia Dock. Within half an hour I stood on the quay looking up at the black side of the *Andalusian*.

The Portuguese sentries had gone. There were dockers running up and down the gangway. The winches hauled in cargo from lighters lying in the Tagus on the starboard side of the ship. Nobody took any notice of me. I walked on board and stopped the first deck steward I met.

"Do you know Mr. Harrison, steward?" I asked.

He did. In fact, he had just taken tea to Mr. Harrison and Mr. Harrison had gone down to his bath. His room? It was No. 39, promenade deck, starboard side. The steward looked at my bag. Was I going on in the ship? Should he direct me to the purser? No, said I: my visit was to Mr. Harrison, a friend of mine, and if I could be shown to the promenade deck, I would wait for him.

Thus Edderley, coming up the companionway three steps at a time, holding up the skirts of his dressing-gown and whistling merrily, nearly fell backwards over the stairs when he saw me.

"Great Scott! Allison!" he cried. "How the—"

"Sh!" I warned him. "I'm Mr. Arthur Jones, come to see my friend Harrison."

Edderley's jaw dropped. Standing there in a blue dressing-gown, with his hair all tousled, he looked like a statue of amazement.

"What on earth has happened?" he asked.

"Take me somewhere to talk without the risk of being heard," said I. "It's rather serious."

## Chapter Eleven

EDDERLEY took me into his own cabin.

"Fortunately," said he, "the ship's not very full this trip, so we got two rooms; Katherine's next door. I was just going to bump on the wall and tell her to get up and look at the Tagus in the morning light."

"How is Miss—I mean Mrs. Edderley?" I asked.

"Oh, fit—wonderful," he said. "What's up, Allison?"

I sat on the couch opposite Edderley's bunk and looked hard at him. He saw the inquiry in my eyes, and set his own face in a grave stare. If ever there had been any glimmer of a suspicion in my mind about Edderley it vanished. I had surprised a blissful honeymoon husband without a care in the world, and not a man who feared justice or felt like a fugitive.

"Anything wrong at home?" he asked.

"You weren't conscious of anything wrong before you left, Edderley?"

He seemed surprised by the question, hesitated, and then said:

"No—that is—no. I suppose it's Iscaster, eh? Taken it badly? Done something silly?"

"You balk at it, old man," said I. "If you

knew of anything wrong before you left—for Heaven's sake tell me!"

"I hesitated because I had a curious experience. But I may have been quite wrong in the idea that flashed into my mind. I gave it the go-by as a silly idea. I'll tell you what it was, if there seems to be any need. Now, out with it, Allison! Why have you come a thousand miles to see me in my dressing-gown?"

Then I told him, while he sat on the edge of the bunk literally gaping at me. I went through the whole story from the point at which Fenstock had shown me the Liverpool *Echo* to the point at which I had given Mr. Pierce's messenger the slip at Mantes.

"My aunt! what a ghastly mess!" was Edderley's comment. "Now I'll tell you, Allison, what the idea was that flashed into my mind. It wasn't such nonsense, after all. It weighed on me a good bit at first. Then I thought it was merely foolish, and I let it go. When I was hurrying across the park to meet Katherine by the gate into the woods, I thought I heard a shot, and I thought the shot came from the house. Then it occurred to me that it might be—"

"Poachers," said I. "The same thought occurred to me."

"Then you heard it, too? You never said a word, Allison."

"No, but I thought a good deal when I saw you turning back and listening at the gate—and a

good deal more when I learned what had happened."

"You don't mean that you suspected—" he began, with a horrified look.

"No, I can honestly say I never really suspected. But when Wilby began to speculate on what had happened, that, of course, was one of the theories. You'd heard nothing at all about Bardolph?"

"Not a word. We've been at sea all the time, with no wireless news. We got in last evening and went ashore to a theater, but I saw no English papers and never thought of looking for English news in a local rag. Besides, Katherine and I haven't been worrying about news. . . . Now, I suppose we're for it. Back to England to face the music. Poor girl! She's well plucked—but this is rather hateful, you know, Allison."

"I should think it would be—if it happened," said I.

"If—? What d'you mean?"

"You aren't usually a thick-head, Edderley. Do you really think I've beaten the record for detective-dodging and rushed from Woodbury to Lisbon just in order to drag you back, when I could have done that with a half-crown telegram?"

Edderley's face brightened.

"Well, when you put it that way it does seem rather strange. But what's the idea?"

I suppose, all my thoughts having been concentrated on the Bardolph business since the Birth of Time, as it seemed to me, I was a little unjustly impatient with Edderley for failing to take it all in at once. I began a laborious examination of the mystery of the dinner-party, of Cantlick's half-suggestions, of Mellon's queer attitude, of the disappearance of Lord Iscaster and Colonel Darley.

"Do you want," I asked him, "to take Mrs. Edderley back to face all this? Do you want to be arrested yourself?—for if I'm not a fool Pierce would clap you in jail on sight, and chance it. My dear Edderley, so far as I've been able to think it out, the proper thing for you to do is to lie doggo till the thing is cleared up, as it's bound to be sooner or later. That's why I came to Lisbon. I didn't want you to see the reports in the papers and come out in the open, as I felt sure you would. And if you didn't see anything I was afraid you would go on to the Canary Islands and be caught there. You can't get far on a small island, and a fugitive Englishman either at Tenerife or Grand Canary would have a very short run for his money. You've got to stay in Europe within reach of cars and trains. How about passports?"

"All right. I got one in London last Thursday when Katherine and I had made up our minds what to do. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison are free to travel in Portugal, Spain, or their possessions."

"And how about money?"

"Enough for some weeks."

"Then," said I, "you've got to leave the ship, and it had better be soon. And then leave Lisbon. I'm pretty certain that I gave Mr. Pierce the slip. But I've a wholesome respect for his thoroughness and the cracking pace he goes. I'd like to see you clear of this within an hour or two. Then I myself will wait to see whether Mr. Pierce or his emissary turns up."

Edderley made some difficulty about accepting my scheme. He lingered over the thought that he ought to "face the music"! I told him that facing the music was a silly phrase, and that a sensible man should not enslave himself to a phrase. But it was his wife who settled it.

I need not try to describe the astonishment with which she found me in her husband's cabin while he was pinning his tie. Or the pleasure with which I saw her, more radiant than ever, in an aura of happiness. Or the changes that passed across her face, like clouds over a summer sky, as she listened to the narrative that I had to reproduce for her. She did not interrupt except to say, when I described the vanishment of Lord Iscaster:

"I know where father has gone. Rather clever—but I wonder why? . . . Never mind."

At the end, as I remarked that Edderley seemed a little doubtful about what he ought to do, she settled it in an instant.

"Of course, Mr. Allison's right, Jim," she said. "I couldn't endure it. There's no good to be done by it, either."

And then it appeared that Edderley was only glad to be persuaded.

# Chapter Twelve

ALL this had taken some time, and the ship's breakfast hour was long past. Edderley had some food brought by the deck steward, and we ate in his cabin.

I had planned it out during my long train journey. The little cottage at Cascaës. My old friend Senhora Almeida. One good turn deserved another, and I would get it from her. At Cascaës they would be quite private, out of reach of any English, and within reach of me while I stayed in Lisbon, which I meant to do until I could determine whether Mr. Pierce had trailed me or not.

"I feel like a Goth or a Hun bursting into a temple," said I to Mrs. Edderley. "I can't expect you really to forgive me, though I know you'll pretend to. It's a shame to spoil your trip to the Fortunate Islands. But I'm afraid it must be given up."

She said she quite saw that, and that I was neither Goth nor Hun, but a friendly Englishman, that forgiveness was not the word but gratitude was—and a lot of other things to put me at ease in what was a very delicate situation.

"Well," I said, "I can't send you to anything so fine as the Fortunate Islands, but if you'll

agree to my plan I think you will be pretty well placed and quite safe. Do you know Lisbon, Edderley?"

"Never set foot in the place till last night," he answered.

"Well, round the corner at the mouth of the Tagus, ten or fifteen miles down, there's a little place called Cascaës. I'm going to take you to Cascaës and introduce you to a friend of mine, the Senhora Almeida. I made her acquaintance about eighteen months ago. I needn't tell you the circumstances. Oh, no—" I said to Mrs. Edderley, "nothing romantic. She's an old lady with a family. But she will do anything in the world to oblige me, even to concealing fugitives. In fact, that's quite in the atmosphere here. Senhora Almeida has a villa at Cascaës, or a little way inland from it, where you can stay till I fetch you away. You may be horrified by her taste in architecture, which is florid—though that's in the atmosphere also. But you'll be delighted with the Senhora. I think her broken English is absolutely delightful. Will you agree?"

Edderley looked at his wife.

"Of course," she said. "We're absolutely in your hands, Mr. Allison. If you think your friend will receive us—"

"Yes—and make you free of everything she has, including her garage and its contents in case of need. You need not worry about that."

"Splendid, Allison," said Edderley. "But it's an extraordinary thing that you should catch us here and have a refuge all prepared for us. It looks like a miracle—"

"Oh, that's mere joss," I said. "My friendship with Senhora Almeida is a mere matter of a day. I've only seen her once in my life. Nevertheless, I stake anything that she'll do what I say. The great thing is to get away quickly. Can you do with what we can carry between us?"

Mrs. Edderley laughed.

"You know how we came away. One of us could carry all we've got. We were going to do some necessary shopping to-day."

"Another crime to my indictment," said I. "I'm going to deprive you even of that simple pleasure. But Senhora Almeida will do any shopping you want. The point is, can't you leave some bags or something here in the cabins? If Pierce has got on the scent and traced me to Lisbon, he'll have guessed the ship, and he'll have it watched. If you go off this morning shopping—his man will certainly come on board and lie in wait for your return if you leave things in such a state as to suggest you're coming back."

"It sounds exciting!" cried Mrs. Edderley. "More like a real elopement this time."

In the end, Edderley stuffed a few essentials of his into my bag and left his own in the cabin; his wife placed her room in a state of admired disorder and sacrificed a few things in the cause

of realism. Edderley carrying the one bag, we passed out of the ship.

"Going shopping," he said to the deck steward as we went. "Shan't trouble to come back for lunch."

"We sail at seven, sir; don't forget."

"Righto! We may be on board for tea," said Edderley.

A few cars for hire stood outside the gateway of the Apollonia Dock, but I passed them by. I intended that we should take a tramcar to the outskirts of the city. Cars could be identified, and the cars at the Apollonia Dock would be the first investigation of any person in search of us. We walked on to the roadway running parallel with the river and waited under the palm trees for a tram.

It was then that the first symptoms of a chase began to make themselves felt. Close to the island in the midst of the broad street where we stood was the post of the civil guard. In the doorway of the guardroom stood three men, talking—two in the guards' gray dress and a policeman.

The officer of the guard suddenly pointed to us, and the policeman immediately walked straight across to us.

"Look out!" said I. "Let me do the talking."

"No chance of my doing any talking: I don't know a word of the lingo," said Edderley. "Who's the person?"

"A policeman," said I.

The little man touched his cap in salute as he came to attention.

"Pardon, Senhor," he said. "You are English. From the *Andalusian?*"

"Yes," I admitted.

"There is a telephone message for Mr. Allison, an English gentleman, expected to arrive at Lisbon to join the *Andalusian*. The steward says there is no Mr. Allison, only a Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Harrison is just gone ashore with a friend. You are not—"

"This is Mr. Harrison, and I am his friend. There may be a mistake in the name. What is the message?"

"I am not permitted to say," said the little man, scrutinizing us closely. "Did Mr. Harrison arrive in Lisbon by railway or come in the ship?"

"In the ship—with Mrs. Harrison," said I. "Evidently not the person you want. But we shall all be back this afternoon. We are going up into the city to the shops, and to lunch. Let me explain to Mr. Harrison."

"Certainly, Senhor."

I turned to Edderley.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"A dodge of you know whom," I replied. "Now, whatever happens, we're going to board this tram. Go and hold it up. I'll get rid of him and join you."

Edderley and his wife stepped into the road towards an approaching tramcar.

"I am sorry I can't help you," said I to the

gendarme. "Perhaps if you were to inquire at the *Andalusian* again? Mr. Allison may have arrived. We shall return by five o'clock. The ship sails at seven."

I thought the policeman looked rather doubtful, but a haughty tone and a step towards the tramcar did for him. He thanked me and saluted again. I jumped up beside Edderley and his wife, and the car rattled on.

"A narrow squeak," I told Edderley. "We left the ship just in time."

# Chapter Thirteen

BOTH my companions seemed to enjoy the incident with a sense of adventure when I explained what the little policeman wanted. Mrs. Edderley's eyes sparkled with excitement. Clearly neither of them had yet got the hang of the thing. To me, however, it was serious. Pierce had traced me in spite of all my precautions. He could not get a man through in time to forestall the sailing of the *Andalusian*. Therefore he had called in the Portuguese police to conduct a delaying action. He could not have known of my route till the wild chauffeur got back to Mantes, which was certainly not till the afternoon of the previous day. Then he could not have discovered my destination without making inquiries at the frontiers for the holder of a passport in the name of Allison. Certainly Mr. Pierce was a prompt man. I quite expected that both at Madeira and at Las Palmas there would be inquiries for Mr. Allison—and perhaps for Mr. Edderley—when the *Andalusian* reached those ports. I had hardly been an hour in front of Pierce the whole way. It was a narrow squeak.

However, I did not worry the Edderleys with these speculations. Once they were safe in hiding

at Senhora Almeida's, Mr. Pierce and I could resume our discussions of the Bardolph case in any form he liked.

I took them on the tramcar as far as the cathedral at Belem, where the two national heroes of Portugal are buried—Camoëns and Vasco da Gama—and thence, more than ever distrusting motor-cars, by the electric train to Cascaës. We walked from the station up the dusty road to Madame Almeida's villa. She greeted me with tempestuous cordiality, and received Edderley and his wife with open arms. When the veteran conspirator heard that they wished to be hidden from enemies and that she was to hide them, I thought she would have even tried to dance for joy. Her only regret was that Senhor Almeida had gone on business to Madeira, and could not welcome the return of his English savior and enjoy the sensation of a new adventure.

So I lunched with them in that rococo plaster palace, and at five o'clock left them, promising to come back as soon as the ship had sailed, or if not then when I had any news, and in any event before I started for England.

I returned to Lisbon by train, and at half-past six was unobtrusively stationed behind a stack of motor-car crates on the Apollonia Dock, whence I could observe the gangway of the *Andalusian*. Nothing in all the going and coming to and from the ship interested me except the passage up and down the gangway at intervals of the little Portuguese gendarme I had seen at the tramway sta-

tion and a very obvious Englishman who accompanied him. They wandered about the promenade deck of the ship scrutinizing every passenger. They came down the gangway and looked anxiously along the quay. They returned on board and had a conversation with the steward, who shook his head and shrugged his shouders. They went off to do the round of the deck again, the steward looking curiously after them. Few passengers were on deck. Probably most of the ship's company were dressing for dinner.

The captain appeared from his quarters on the boat deck and took position on the bridge. Whistles were blown. A few laborers appeared on the quay and handled the mooring ropes at the orders of officers standing in various parts of the ship—all the symptoms of immediate departure.

The gendarme and his companion were shepherded down the gangway, reluctant to leave. The gangway was pulled ashore, and the door in the ship's side banged fast. The *Andalusian* began to edge away from the quay.

I did not move until the dockers had been reabsorbed into the landscape, the few curious who had watched the ship maneuvering into the river had turned back, and the gendarme and his companion walked silently towards the guardroom. There was a special reason why I did not wish to be seen by the Englishman. When the coast was quite clear I walked out and took a tram to the city, feeling a little elated over the checkmating

of smart Mr. Pierce. At the Rocio Square I got off and entered the restaurant of the hotel, intending to dine, to telephone to Edderley at Senhora Almeida's, and to catch the night train.

I had handed my case to a porter, been shown to a table, taken my seat, and ordered my dinner, when a man came into the room and was brought up to the table and placed opposite me. It was the Englishman who half an hour before had stepped down the gangway of the *Andalusian,* whom I was anxious to avoid because three days before I had caught a glimpse of his face as he passed my garden gate at Woodbury.

He gave his bowler hat to the waiter who had ushered him, sat down, and looked across to me.

"Good evening," said he. "You don't mind?"

# Chapter Fourteen

I DID "mind" very strongly. Whatever is meant by the sensation of the heart sinking into the boots I experienced—a feeling part dismay and part rage at my inability to shake off Mr. Pierce.

No fear for myself entered into the feeling. Mr. Pierce was quite innocuous to me. But I had meant to shake him off—and here, in the person of his minion, he hung on to me from hour to hour.

I said: "Not at all," in a tone of bored indifference, and turned to the card—it was the only refuge. Then an idea came. I called a waiter and asked for a newspaper. He brought *O Mundo* of that morning, asked if he should send out for an evening paper, but I said, no, this would do. The transaction gave me time to recover my temper. From behind the paper I glanced at my opposite number, who evidently did not speak Portuguese and was ordering his dinner by pointing at the card. He took no notice of me, except to look rather cross when he caught my supercilious eye.

It dawned on me suddenly that this man, who had watched my windows at Woodbury and come to Lisbon in search of me, had never seen

me, did not know me from Adam, as the saying is, that his presence in the restaurant was an accident, and his seat at my table the fruit of the ingenious idea of the head-waiter—that he would put two Englishmen together!

I said nothing to him while we both took the edges off our appetites. But this discovery made a difference. It might make a very great difference indeed if I could entice him to talk—I might get some hint of Mr. Pierce's methods and intentions.

The queer little orchestra on a low platform at the end of the room gave the opening. It had played some popular tune of the day—I think it was called "Valencia"—with a curious effect. I should never have believed that three mandolines and a piano could produce such orchestral effects.

"Not much like an English hotel band," I said.

"Oh, are you English?" he exclaimed. "First I thought you were, and then when you spoke to the waiter I thought you weren't. No—I never heard anything exactly like that. But, anyhow, this is a funny place."

"First visit?" I asked.

He nodded. "Got in this afternoon. Getting out again as soon as possible."

"Oh, I say!" cried I. "That's too bad. There are lots of interesting things in Lisbon. You ought to see—"

"Yes, I dare say. No doubt. But the interesting thing I want to see does not appear to be in Lisbon. Lord knows where it is."

He looked rather whimsical as he said this.

"What is it?" said I, in the same vein. "Buried treasure or an honest man?"

"I don't know whether the man's honest, as I've never seen him in my life; and I don't know what he's done with the treasure. But you're right to this extent—that I'm looking for a man and a treasure. Do you know Lisbon at all well?"

"Oh," said I, "only just. I spent some time in the neighborhood a year or two ago, and now I'm just passing through on my way to England."

"Don't know anything about the Lisbon police, I suppose?"

"Not much. I had an adventure with a pickpocket when I was here before. The crowd caught him; the police administered summary justice to him by nearly knocking his head off. But, seeing the amount of petty crime there is in the city, I suppose the police are not too efficient. Perhaps they don't have time to get going between one Revolution and the next."

"Perhaps not. Of course, not knowing the language makes it difficult," said he; "but they struck me as being the last word in stupidity."

I took a long time over my next drink, considering.

"I expect," said I, "we English are a bit spoiled, you know, with our Scotland Yard, and our model policemen whom every one likes, and our freedom from crime."

"Perhaps, perhaps," said he. "What does one drink in Lisbon? Water unsafe?"

"No—they say not. But you never know. If one does not want to spend like Crœsus, one drinks the wine of the country. This Granjo is quite good. Try it."

The man drank of my wine and himself ordered a bottle.

"Not been in England lately?" he asked.

"Not for some little time," I replied.

"Ah—then I suppose you've not heard the latest development in the Bardolph case?"

If he had known all about me, he could not have lit upon a more awkward question. I tried to look puzzled.

"Bardolph?" said I. "What's a Bardolph case? It sounds like something out of Shakespeare."

"It's too long to explain. I thought you might have seen something in the papers. Bardolph, the financier, was thought to have committed suicide, but now they say he was murdered—and everybody who could possibly know anything about it is missing."

"Oh, that won't last long," I assured him. "That's where the efficiency of our police will come in. They solve all the murder mysteries in the long run. But—it just occurs to me: you aren't in the police service, by any chance?"

"Me! Good Lord!" he cried. "No, I'm in business. I suppose it wouldn't interest you, but I'm looking for a man who left England a few

days ago and is believed to have come to Lisbon with a treasure belonging to my firm. In fact, it's a work of art. We want to get the treasure back without putting the matter into the hands of the police. If we get the treasure we say nothing about his conduct. But if he doesn't disgorge, I'm afraid he's in for a bad time, sooner or later. I thought I had him on a ship this evening, but the pea under the thimble is stationary compared with this gentleman, so I suppose I shall have to go back to England without him or the treasure either. However, I shall clear to-morrow or next day. Now what about a smoke?"

"Let's go out on the square and have our coffee," said I, jumping up.

I simply could not sit still. The last remarks of my companion had created wild excitement in my mind. Obviously I had been utterly misled into the idea that he was an emissary of Pierce. He had no connection with the police. He was not even after Edderley. He probably knew nothing more of Edderley than he had read in the newspapers.

The Englishman who had left England a few days ago was myself. The "treasure" I was supposed to have purloined was Miss Mellon. The fellow was all at sea in Lisbon, knowing no Portuguese, and he had fastened on to the first Englishman he met to relieve his overcharged feelings! . . .

It seemed fantastic—another bit of miraculous luck.

His "firm" was, of course, Balter. The girl had evidently been tracked down to Woodbury, and possibly to my house. There had been suspicion about Wilby's midnight departure, and they had made inquiries in Hull, but found no Adelaide Mellon there. It was for Balter that somebody had been bribed to tap the telephone wire and been mystified by the conversation about a picture. Somehow or other they had discovered where Fenstock and I went on the Tuesday night. It was they who had sent the telegram that overtook me at Havre. . . .

# Chapter Fifteen

THUS far I had thought it out while we transferred ourselves to the pavement outside the restaurant and ordered our coffee. I would go all over it again later on. Meanwhile, the overpowering and splendid facts were that Edderley and his wife need fear nothing from Pierce, who was perhaps scouring the north of England for them, and that Miss Mellon, in her Yorkshire village, need fear nothing from Balter, who was scouring Southern Europe for her.

"What about a theater?" asked the commercial gentleman, who had resumed his bowler hat.

"I'm engaged for to-night," said I. "But I see in the paper that there's a brilliant revue at the Eden Theatre. That's only a step from here—in the Praça dos Restauradores. Starts at nine o'clock. You could do the first house and be in bed before midnight."

I had been on the point of telling him that I meant to take the night train home. Some breath of caution stopped me. We sat for a quarter of an hour watching the gay scene and listening to the music of a band playing somewhere in the square. Then I excused myself, went into the hotel, and got Senhora Almeida on the telephone.

"I don't want to speak English," said I, "so don't call my friends. Tell them all will be well

if they keep inside. I have to go back by train to-night. When I write it will be to you. I shall not telegraph."

I could heard the old lady gurgling with delight over the mystery as she wished me *adios*.

As I turned away from the telephone-box I was glad I had not spoken English. The man in the bowler hat stood outside waiting for me.

"I think I shall go to the theater," said he, "so I'll wish you good-by. Many thanks. If we don't meet again I shan't forget you saved me from a fit of the blues to-night."

"Good-by," said I. "Only too glad."

He turned into the hotel corridor. I got my bag from the porter and walked to the Central Station, bought my ticket, secured a berth, and straightway went to bed.

In the morning I was two hundred miles away from the man in the bowler hat. Early on Sunday morning I reached Paris. There was a boat train from St. Lazare at 10 o'clock. I had comfortable time to inquire at the General Post Office for letters and to breakfast at the station.

I had not much expectation of a message from Fenstock, but the clerk at the counter handed me a letter addressed to "Arthur Jones, Esq., Poste Restante," and in Fenstock's unmistakable spidery writing. It had been posted at Godalming on Friday. I opened it in the office and read. Fenstock had neither dated nor signed it. The letter resembled a stilted exercise in composition by a child at school:

The car was followed after all. The chauffeur was held up on his way back. He got away and has not been seen since by any of them. They only just missed the boat.

The place in the wood wants watching. Something peculiar is going on.

As no telegrams are delivered on Sunday, if the chauffeur has no message before, he will be waiting at Swansea all day in case he should be wanted there.

Fenstock was not free with his pen, but he had a talent for cramming a lot of information into a small space, and a weird knack of divining things that might happen. It had not struck me before that, however urgently I might want him on Sunday, I could not get him because there was no Sunday opening of the telegraph office at Godalming. But Fenstock had thought it all out, and used our code to tell me that he would be waiting for the boat at Newhaven if by any chance I crossed that way.

And Fenstock's terse message explained the presence of the man in the bowler hat at Lisbon. They had guessed at the boat and tried to detain me in Paris by that telegram. They had probably taken the morning boat from Newhaven or Folkestone—but, no, that would not have put them on my scent at Mantes. They must have flown over.

Who, then, was Balter, that he commanded unlimited money and service in pursuit of his end? The fellow seemed to have a hundred eyes. The thought of him stoked up my anger. One of those hundred eyes might spy out Ade-

laide Mellon in her village, however remote. I had been spied in Woodbury Manor Woods, and on the Southampton Road, and run down at Lisbon. If Balter could do this—

I put Fenstock's letter in my pocket and turned away. As I passed out into the street, a young man turned, too, and hurried off. His figure seemed familiar, though I could not place him for a moment. There were few people about. I followed him. Then I remembered, and the memory caused me to wonder whether I had not been living for two days in a fool's paradise.

There was an easy way to find out. I stopped, turned on my heels, walked in the opposite direction for a hundred yards, then took a side street and came to rest in a doorway a few paces down. Within a minute the young man hurried breathlessly round the corner, and almost ran into me as I stepped on to the pavement.

*"Hola!"* said I to the lightning driver of the garage at Mantes. "What a surprise!"

"What a surprise! You have reason, monsieur."

The young sportsman was taken aback, but made a gallant attempt to recover his composure.

"Apparently," said I, "I failed to pay you enough for the trip to Bordeaux."

"Oh, no, monsieur was most liberal."

"Then you are greedy," said I. "How much did the gentleman in the billycock hat pay you to tell him where I went?"

"Monsieur!—there was no request that your

journey should be secret. How could I know—"

"Perhaps, my young friend. But when you received a telegram from him yesterday asking you to watch me off the train at Gare d'Orleans and follow my steps and meet him at the train tonight, you must have known, *hein?*"

It was a shot in the dark, but it went home. The youth blushed and stammered.

"Now," I said, "you are not going to be a spy. You are going right home to Mantes, is it not? After a voyage like ours, my young friend, you will not play me a trick, I believe."

His lamentable face brightened up.

"I am ashamed," he said. "I did not reflect. You will pardon me, monsieur? I return to Mantes at once. I do not seek to know where you go or what you do. I have not seen you. You did not arrive by the train—"

"As you will," said I. "It is nothing to me. Simply, I dislike being spied on. We part here—good friends, I hope."

"You are generous, monsieur," said the youth, raising his hat. "*Adieu,* monsieur." He walked away in the direction of the Halles, and I turned back towards the Boulevards and St. Lazare.

Once a spy, always a spy, it is said. But I felt sure that the boy would not spy on me any more. He was an amateur at the game and had obviously been smitten with shame before he had well embarked on his first experiment. The humiliating fact for me was that I had been fooled to the top of my bent by the commercial gentleman in

the bowler hat. I was his dupe, while I had thought him mine.

All that elaborate business in the restaurant at Lisbon!—how he must have laughed in his sleeve as he lulled me into a false sense of security by his pretended confidence.

I had come off very badly as an actor. Compared with his talents mine were negligible. But he had unwittingly given me one piece of information of great value—I knew that he cared nothing about Edderley but was looking for Miss Mellon—that he was the employee of the man Balter and not of the English police.

I took my breakfast at the station buffet, reached Dieppe about noon, and at four o'clock landed at Newhaven. As soon as I had passed the Customs Fenstock was at my side. He touched his hat, led the way to the car, and held the door open for me.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," said he. "It's time we found out what that six-foot-three of nastiness is up to at the gamekeeper's cottage. I suppose it's straight home now, sir?"

"Yes, Fenstock. The quicker the better."

# PART III

# The Man Behind the Mask

# Chapter One

THE prescient Fenstock had foreseen my eagerness for news. Before he started up the car, he handed me a bundle of Sunday papers.

"I thought you might like to see the latest about the Bardolph case, sir," said he, "so I got these."

I read them on the way to Woodbury. The hue and cry for Edderley was loud. The police had taken a new line. They no longer requested him to communicate with them. They had issued a warrant for his arrest. Every policeman in the country strained eyes for him.

The ingenious man Pierce had pieced the story together skillfully. Clearly he had reached the theory of murder (or at least of homicide) and of Edderley's guilt by almost exactly the same process as Wilby, and, in fact, with less evidence than Wilby: the chief "piece of conviction"—the bullet from Bardolph's own pistol—was unknown to Pierce, since Wilby had it in his pocket-book.

Mr. Pierce had deduced everything from the sudden disappearance of all the persons who could know anything about the tragedy. He had not at first discovered the tell-tale book. But he had thought of comparing the bullet which had killed Bardolph with the pistol from which it was

supposed to have been fired—and that proved conclusive. It was a bullet of much larger caliber than the bore of the tiny revolver Bardolph had held in his hand. But a shot had undoubtedly been discharged from Bardolph's pistol—and Mr. Pierce ultimately found the billet it had reached.

Whether the detective had constructed the theory, or it had been invented by the newspapers, was hard to divine from the reports. But there it was—the theory of an angry dispute between Bardolph and Edderley about Miss Darley, and firing on both sides, and the death of Bardolph. It might be a case of justifiable homicide in self-defense; but Major Edderley must come forward and prove it. The fact that he was in hiding cast grave suspicion upon him.

Thus, to the length of columns. And yet, never a word about Mellon. Mr. Pierce had contrived to keep to himself the disappearance of Mellon. I put the papers down.

Why? Had Mr. Pierce any special reason for secrecy about Mellon? Was all this stuff about Edderley a blind? Did he suspect Mellon and expect to get him by creating in his mind a false idea of the police theory? It seemed quite possible.

I took up the papers again. They developed one other major theme—the position of the Anglo-Iberian Corporation. Cantlick's prophecy was coming true once more. After the collapse

that followed Bardolph's death and the abortive meeting, the stock began to rise. It was now soaring. John K. Pillar had issued the promised statement. It had been a repetition of his confidence in the soundness of the concern, followed by the announcement that he was prepared to support Anglo-Iberians with all his resources. The worst devices of the bears, even combined with the terrible effects of the tragedy at Woodbury Manor, having failed utterly to destroy the Corporation because of its intrinsic soundness, John K. Pillar was certain that a plot, whose source he could guess at but never know with certainty, had broken down. At any rate, there would shortly appear a scheme for a merger between the interests he represented and the interests of the Anglo-Iberian Corporation.

That was enough. The public which had rushed to unload now rushed to load themselves with Anglo-Iberians. . . .

"Thanks, Fenstock," said I. "Very interesting, but nothing very new. Have you been home since I left?"

"Not that anybody knows of, sir. But I've sat in the kitchen one or two nights and had a little chat with Mrs. Batting."

"Oh? And has anything happened at home?"

"No, sir, not that you could say 'happened.' The gentleman from Scotland Yard called a time or two before he left Woodbury. Seemed unaccountably annoyed that you had gone away, and

very unreasonable with Mrs. Batting because she didn't know where you was. Oh, most cross, he was."

"And so he's gone? And all is quiet?"

"Very quiet at home, sir. But in Woodbury Manor Woods, not so quiet, sir. That is, I've heard some strange noises."

"Yes, Fenstock," said I. "Go on. Tell it all in order."

"Well, sir, it began when I was on my way back from Southampton after I'd left you at the docks. I wasn't quite half-way—just before Haslemere—and 'twas about half-past eleven when I seen head-lights coming down the hill. About two hundred yards from me they stopped right in the middle of the road, and I had to pull up. A man hails me, gets out of the car, and comes up to me. He says: 'Is this the way to Petersfield?' And I says: 'I don't know—I'm a stranger in these parts.' 'Oh,' says he, 'thanks.' And he goes back to the car. It was the chap that was patrolling outside the house and we seen afterwards following us through the woods. I hears him say to his driver: 'We can hardly do it, but try—drive like hell!' And on they goes. I takes the car to Bill Burch's at Godalming, and the next day I finds my way privately to Woodbury, and Mrs. Batting tells me that the chap in the bowler hats comes to the door the night before about nine o'clock and asks for you. And she tells him you ain't at home and she don't know

where you are. But I guess he missed the boat, sir."

"He did," said I, "but he got across somehow next day—flew, I expect—and he's been chasing me all over the Continent. But wait a minute—"

I had just thought of the telegram from Hull that reached me at Havre. If it had been sent by the man in the bowler hat and not by Pierce, how had he contrived to hand it in at Hull? After all, there was no real difficulty. An obliging post office will accept a telegram over the telephone from any subscriber. I could find out the subscriber in this instance later on. There were a good many things about Mr. Balter and his performances that I should have to find out later on.

"All right, Fenstock," said I. "Continue. About those noises in the wood."

"Well, sir, thinks I, the best thing I can do is to find out what the little game is in Woodbury Manor Woods. You know, Mr. Bardolph didn't do any game-preserving—wasn't much of a sportsman. That keeper's cottage is down in the thickest part of the wood, at the end of a long grass drive where nobody ever goes. It was empty in the time the last tenant had the place, and there'd been nobody there ever since. Queer that there crooked-nosed footman should be there waiting for the chap in the bowler hat. So, late at night I prowls round prospecting. All quiet. Not a light nor a sound. I thinks the place is

empty again. I tries the door, and it's locked. Then I hears somebody coming down the drive on the grass. You know the sort of sound: you can only just hear it. I makes myself scarce among the trees. Mr. Footman comes along—I couldn't have told it was him except for his being such a lanky swine—and shoves a key in the door and goes in. Still there was no light and no sound. I was almost afraid to move in case he should come out again in a hurry. But I works round quietly to the back and listens and peeps. Not a sound. That's a cottage not much more than a hut—only it's two stories high. Just the one door. No back, no yard—just brick walls all round, and the two windows in the front facing the drive. In about a quarter-hour, out comes Mr. Footman and locks the door after him and goes off again. When he's gone, I tries the window, but it's fastened and there's a heavy shutter inside. I dare say I could have forced it, but not without making a big noise. Last night I thinks I ought to have done it."

I was startled by Fenstock's tone.

"Eh?" said I. "What does that mean, Fenstock?"

"I wrote to you, sir, that there was something peculiar at the keeper's cottage. That was after I had been there—let me see, Thursday night. Mr. Footman comes up same time and goes in same fashion. I was behind the house that night. As soon as he gets inside the door and locks it, I hears him shout out: 'Damn you!' That's all.

Not another word nor another sound. He comes out as usual and goes away."

"There's somebody in the cottage?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, no doubt on it," said Fenstock. "But I couldn't be quite sure that night. You know the habit some people has of damning at anything, and the fellow might have knocked his leg against something in the dark. But last night I made sure."

"Ah!" said I. "How?"

"I got there early, sir, and I took a bit of risk. I'd had a good look at the place, and I brought a brace and an inch bit with me."

"What on earth are they?" said I.

"Don't you know, sir? One of those there carpenter's gimlets that you wind round like a drill to make big holes."

"Ah—through the door?"

"No, sir. I chose the sill of the window—giving me a better chance if I wanted to hop it quick. So when Mr. Footman comes along I've got a spyhole an inch round through the sill of the window and under the shutter. I peeped through before he got there, but it was all dark. As soon as he's inside, I nips round. There's a glimmer of light in the room, but my spyhole is through three inches of wood and I can't see anything except a spot of the wall on the other side. But I can hear. And I hears voices."

Fenstock had made his narration in his level, matter-of-fact way; but even that imperturbable

man could not resist the obvious dramatic pause.

"They spoke so low for a long time that I couldn't make out anything. I was afraid it was all no go, and Mr. Footman would be off again before I found out his little game. Then they gets a bit warm, whoever it is, and I begins to hear most of what they're saying. One of them says the other's a dam' fool, and the one says that it is the footman: I recognizes his voice—to say nothing of his language. And then he says: 'Why can't you own up and say where she is?' And the other says: 'I've told you an 'undred times I don't know.' "

"Did you recognize that voice, too, Fenstock?" I asked.

"No, sir—I don't know as ever I heard it before. Footman goes on: 'That's a blasted lie. You do know. Now, look here,' says he, 'if you don't want to be hanged for shootin' Bardolph, you better tell. I only got to hold up my little finger, and they'll nab you. I seen you shoot him myself.' "

"Good heavens!" I cried.

"Yes, sir, that's what Footman says. And the other says he's a filthy liar. 'Oh, no,' says Footman, 'I ain't no liar. We got you fixed. If you tell us where she is, all right. We knows how to deal with her. If you don't, well, then, you're for it.' And then the other one tells him to get out of his sight, and there's a movement in the room, and I hops it round to the back. Footman comes out and locks the door and goes away. I

comes back to my spyhole and listens. Not a sound. I calls through: 'Is anybody there wants help?' Not a sound. And I says it again. No answer. Then I says: 'If anybody's there and wants help, there will be help handy to-morrow night.' "

"What made you say that, Fenstock?" I asked him.

"I meant it, sir. If you hadn't come home to-day, I was going to get two or three handy fellows from Bill Burch and we would have been inside there in two shakes. But, of course, it's for you to say."

I took some minutes to think it over. It was puzzling. Fenstock's summary policy might be the sound one. On the other hand, if my theory was good that Mr. Pierce's chase of Edderley was nothing but a blind and he was really after other game?

"Any idea who it is—I mean in the keeper's cottage, Fenstock?"

"Yes, sir."

"Same idea as mine, I expect."

"I shouldn't be surprised, sir. Of course, it's Mr. Mellon. But what it all means—"

"Neither you nor I can tell. We'll just think it over the rest of the way, if you don't mind."

"Very good, sir."

Fenstock bent his mind to the car, and the pace improved. We reached Woodbury before dark.

## Chapter Two

MY cogitations on Fenstock's story made me hot and cold by turns. A quiet lawyer and his law-abiding chauffeur were pitted against a set of people who knew no law. There was something peculiarly disquieting in the turn given to the Bardolph case by these discoveries of Fenstock's. They explained the disappearance of Mellon. But was Mellon hiding of his own purpose? If I interfered, should I be bringing trouble upon Mellon? Or was he detained against his will?

It was impossible to settle these questions. If any false step of mine did bring Adelaide Mellon's brother into the hands of the police in the Bardolph case— But I would not follow that line.

Mrs. Batting welcomed me as coolly as if I had returned from a visit to Eastbourne. She promised me dinner in an hour. Nothing had happened, she said, since Mr. Pierce had left Woodbury—that was on Thursday. Not even Sergeant Foker had called. There was no letter from Wilby.

I summoned Fenstock after dinner.

"How soon could you get your handy fellows over from Godalming?"

"An hour and a half, if I have the car and fetch them, sir."

"And could you keep them in hand? Would they do exactly as they were told and know nothing about anything if asked?"

"You can leave that to me and Bill Burch, sir."

Fenstock's eyes betokened his excitement, and his eyes alone.

"Then I think you shall go at once and bring them over. What time does the footman get to the cottage?"

"Half-past eleven every night, punctual as a clock," said Fenstock.

"It's now 8.30," said I. "Post your handy fellows where you like near the cottage. Then come on here for me."

I had formed a plan, which had its risks but was probably the best that could be devised, if my conjections were right. I would ascertain whether Mellon was a fugitive or a prisoner, and act accordingly. But in either circumstance, I would make quite sure that the threat to Adelaide Mellon was removed. Now that Edderley was safe, as I believed, my only interest in the Bardolph business was to see that Adelaide Mellon escaped contact with it.

There could only be one inference from what Fenstock had heard if Mellon was a prisoner. It was that some connection existed between the events at Bardolph's dinner-party and the pursuit of Adelaide Mellon. She and her brother

were to be played off against each other—her coercion against his life and his safety against her surrender. That seemed to be the plot. I had been followed all the way to Lisbon under the suspicion that I had Adelaide with me or that I was going to her. The man in the bowler hat (as I thought of him for want of a better identification) had evidently telegraphed that this was a false scent. No doubt they had their watch on Wilby. They were putting great pressure on Mellon.

Well, we might be able to burst up the plot with the assistance of Fenstock's handy fellows. There were hazards. But, what was that ancient saw about the faint heart and the fair lady?

I put a call through to Wilby. It was unlikely in the circumstances that it would be tapped this time. If it was—still, I put it through.

Wilby answered just before Fenstock's return.

"Hullo," he said. "That you, Allison? I've been too busy to write."

"Just as well," I answered. "Have you still got the picture?"

"It's in the same place."

"Nobody been after it?"

"Not a soul."

"Well, I rang to say that I want it back again, and I'm coming to fetch it to-morrow. Do you remember where you turned a point to port?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Could you meet me there at, let me see, ten o'clock in the morning?"

"Yes, certainly. What's it all about?"

"Ring off now, Wilby. Love to Margaret."

"Righto. Good-by."

Almost on the instant, Fenstock reported. I made him take a thick stick, and mounted one myself. We went the same way as on the Tuesday night as far as the gate into the woods, and then he led me to the grass drive and through it to the keeper's cottage.

It was an insignificant building, hardly visible among the trees. We took a position in the thicket close to it.

"Tell your fellows to gather at the side of the house as soon as he's gone in," said I.

Fenstock flitted off to give the instruction, and returned silently to my side a few minutes later. Our vigil was not long. A tall figure came down the middle of the drive—hardly more than a shadow. It went to the door of the cottage. There was the noise of a key in the lock. The figure disappeared through the doorway, and the key grated again.

"Now for the peephole," said I to Fenstock in a whisper.

## Chapter Three

FROM the darkness of the wood three silent men appeared as we crossed the turf. I whispered to Fenstock instructions how to place them—against the wall at the side of the door, so that they would not be seen immediately by a person opening it. When the tall footman reappeared, they were to seize and silence him. The rest I would decide as need might be. . . .

The rest happened very quickly.

Fenstock showed me the little hole he had made in the wooden sill of the window, and I bent down and peeped. Nothing could be seen, as he said, except a tiny circle of whitewashed wall on the other side of the room. I applied my ear to the hole and listened. A rumbling voice came through. I recognized Mellon's tones —something hoarse, but his unmistakably.

"You're such a liar that I would not believe you on oath."

"That's your funeral," said another voice. "What I tell you now happens to be true. We've found out where she is. That damned little worm Allison has led us a dance half-way round the world, but we've found her, all the same. And to-morrow morning we'll have her. She'll give us best, good and easy, when she hears what's going to happen to you if she don't. And

when we've got her out of harm's way, then you can quit. It's only your own damned obstinacy that's kept you here so long, Mellon."

"Lie away," said Mellon. "I'm not listening. But spit out all the lies you want to tell as quickly as you can. Give me the rest of the food, you scoundrel, and do your dirty job, and then clear out."

"No good getting in a naughty temper, Mellon. You might have known Jim Balter would be one too many for you."

Then silence. I felt my fists aching. I wished for a moment to be one of Fenstock's handy fellows. Jim Balter—I was within a yard or two of Jim Balter, and he had found out Adelaide's hiding-place, and—

"If all goes according to program, Mellon, this is the last time it'll be necessary. As soon as I hear they've got her away, I'll come and release you."

The voices came through again.

"I warn you," said Mellon, "that if I can kill you, I shall."

"Yes, I guess you will. But you can't. I'll take care of that. Now then, no monkey-tricks. Take it like a gentleman."

And silence again.

I touched Fenstock's arm. He gave a little "Hist!" to his handy fellows. There was a footstep behind the door. The key rattled. The lock turned. The door opened, and the tall footman bobbed his head as he came out.

Not a sound was made. One pair of arms went round his neck and a big hand closed his mouth. Another pair gripped his legs. Two of the likely fellows laid him out on the turf face downwards and sat on him, and the other scientifically tied a handkerchief between his teeth and then trussed him. So much for Balter.

Fenstock produced a torch and lit up the doorway. We rushed in. The door opened directly into the one large room on the ground floor.

Fenstock's torch flashed a circle of white light round the room, and it came to rest on a prone figure upon a heap of bracken. There was not a stick of furniture in the place.

I stepped forward and knelt beside the bracken bed.

"Mellon!" I cried.

He was hardly recognizable. A week's growth of beard had blackened his face; he was dirty and disheveled, and a gag was tied loosely in his mouth; his feet and hands were bound.

"Hold the torch, sir," said Fenstock. "We'll soon have those things off!"

He got to work on gag and bandages while I held the light. In a minute or two Mellon was on his feet. But he looked ghastly. Apart from his dirt and dishevelment, he was pale and very weak. He reeled like a man in drink or illness.

"Pull yourself together, Mellon," said I, "and come out of this."

"Is it you, Allison?" his hoarse voice asked. "I can see very little. That scoundrel drugged

me. Every night he fed me—bromide, I think. But, thank God, you found me. Just in time, Allison. There's some mischief on foot about my sister. He says you know something of her. We must get busy—"

Mellon made a step or two, but stumbled and would have fallen if I had not steadied him.

Fenstock and I, one on each side, led him out into the open. Two of the handy fellows still sat on the footman. The other kept watch. Mellon leaned against the wall and took deep breaths.

What to do with Mellon now we had found him?

As for me, I intended within half an hour to be off northwards to see to the safety of Miss Mellon. When listening to the cold-blooded threats of the pseudo-footman I had hoped that Mellon would be able to go with me. Evidently he could not stand such a journey. I might hide him at my house, but it was risky. I turned to Fenstock and walked him out of hearing. Yes—he thought Bill Burch would do so much for him, he said, when I made my proposal. I sent him to get the car and bring it round to the nearest point in the road. Meanwhile, I went back to Mellon and told him what we intended.

He was amazed that I thought concealment necessary. He knew nothing of the police search for him. But before explaining anything, I thought we had better dispose of the man who lay on the ground with two genial ruffians keeping him down.

"Who is this fellow, Mellon?" said I. "What shall we do with him? Is he dangerous? Or can we let him go? I suppose he's Balter?"

"Balter! Good Lord, no!" exclaimed Mellon. "Balter's jackal. I never saw him before last week, but I've got a good idea who he is. Until my sister is safe, and until—well, never mind. . . . Anyhow, I shouldn't let him go yet, Allison."

"All right. Then stick him in there and lock him up," said I to the handy fellows.

They frogmarched him into the cottage, and dumped him where Mellon had been. I told them to loosen his gag a little. Then we locked the door on him.

"Now," I said, "you fellows can see there's been a queer bit of work here. We want to keep that chap quiet until we've cleared it up a little. It won't be long—a matter of hours. Can you undertake to guard him till then? Two will be enough. The other can keep in touch with Mr. Burch, and some time to-morrow I'll telegraph instructions through him. You can have some money to be going on with. I don't want to know your names or see your faces; and you don't know my name, you haven't seen me, and you never heard of Mr. Mellon. Is it a deal?"

It was, they said.

"Well, then, two of you come with us and we'll drive to the 'Grey Goose.' One can get some provisions and come back with them. The

other can stay there till Mr. Burch hears from me."

The handy fellows selected their rôles, and Mellon and I walked past the house down the grass drive towards the road, two of them following us. I told him briefly what had happened to me, his sister's predicament with Balter, and what I had done with her. I described to him the hunt for Edderley. I said I now proposed to go north and see that no harm came to Miss Mellon. I deliberately refrained from asking the question uppermost in my mind. I was certain Mellon knew who had killed Bardolph, and that his own adventure was a consequence of that knowledge. But I wanted him to tell me in his own way at his own time.

He seemed on the point of blurting out something once or twice. But nothing came. Instead, when I had finished my tale, he said:

"I'm not going to try to thank you, Allison. Of course I'm very grateful. You've done a monstrous lot for people you know nothing about."

I said anybody would have been bound to do it.

"I'm very fond of my sister, Allison," he switched off. "She's all I've got. I wouldn't have put up with that reptile Bardolph as long if I hadn't been trying to make some easy money for her."

I said I could quite understand that anybody would do anything for such a girl as Miss Mel-

lon. There may have been a special warmth in my tone. He checked his walk as if to say something, but thought better of it.

When we reached the road, Fenstock was there with the car. I put Mellon in beside him and told him what we proposed to do. I got into the back with the two toughs. Fenstock let her out for Godalming, and drew up in a lane at the back of the Grey Goose Inn. These regions and their inhabitants were all unknown to me. I left Fenstock to arrange with Mr. William Burch for the bestowal of Mellon in a private place and for the necessary ministry to his comfort. I promised that any information we obtained in the morning should be telegraphed to Mr. Burch. Mellon vanished into the stable-yard of the "Grey Goose." The two hard cases melted away. Fenstock took his place at the wheel again.

"Now, Fenstock, northward!—and don't stop till you get to that village where you dropped the young lady last Tuesday morning."

"Very good, sir," said Fenstock. "But I ought to tell you that Bill Burch has had a message from Mrs. Batting. Mr. Cantlick is at Woodbury and very much wants to see you."

"Cantlick!" I cried. "Good heavens!"

This was another complication. If Cantlick was back in England and had come secretly to my house he must have urgent need of me. But time pressed. I simply ached to be on my way to the north.

"How much longer will it take to go round by Woodbury, Fenstock?"

"Matter of half an hour, sir."

"Then go on—Woodbury first."

## Chapter Four

FENSTOCK drove desperately. We were outside my house in less than half an hour. I rushed into the study. Cantlick sat there, his coat and hat thrown on a chair. We shook hands.

"Look here, Cantlick," said I, "I know you've got a heap to say. But not now. Put on your coat and come on. We're going on an all-night drive to reach Miss Mellon before Balter gets at her."

"Ah!" cried Cantlick. "So she came to you? All right, Allison. I understand, I'll come. But do you know Balter? Have you got a gun?"

"You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do. Balter doesn't understand our soft little English ways. Take your gun. I've got mine. If we meet that worthy we may very likely want 'em."

I took a Service revolver from a drawer of my writing-table, and a little box of cartridges. I had never handled the things since the War, and I hated them. But if Balter was that kind of man . . .

On the road Cantlick told me why he had come back. In Paris he had read of the turn the Bardolph case had taken and of the police warrant for Edderley's arrest. He knew of my friend-

ship with Edderley, and there were things he wanted to discuss with me—things which I could not possibly know—about that Friday dinner-party at Bardolph's.

Of course, I remarked, the story put up for the benefit of the coroner and the police was a pack of lies. We had discovered that next day.

"How?" said Cantlick, surprised.

I related our visit to Woodbury Manor House and the find that Wilby had made.

"Well, that's astonishing," said Cantlick.

"Hadn't you better tell me what really did happen?" I asked. "You know, Cantlick, it was a bit queer—all you people going off like that."

"Very well, then. I'll tell you, and perhaps you won't think it so queer. We did it to save Major Edderley and his wife. It was a fantastic scheme, but it was the best we could think of."

"To save Edderley! How do you mean?"

"Well, of course, Allison, I won't suggest that Edderley didn't shoot in self-defense. But you'll admit that it would have been hard to prove it. When a man comes into a room masking his eyes and a revolver in his hand—well, self-defense, you know, seems a bit far-fetched."

I gasped out the exclamation: "Are you out of your senses, Cantlick?"

"No," he replied; "I'm perfectly cool and collected, and I've measured every word."

"But, my dear man, Edderley had nothing to do with it—nothing. I tell you! He wasn't even in the house at the time."

"Well, that's what we proposed to put up as a theory if we were pushed, Allison. But we didn't want to be pushed, so we all agreed that in the circumstances a suicide story would go down, and that none of us wanted to get Edderley into trouble for a man like Bardolph. Old Lord Iscaster went nearly out of his mind, but, of course, he was anxious that his daughter's name should be kept out of it, so he agreed to go where he couldn't be found. Colonel Darley would have liked to shoot Bardolph himself—so he agreed. And I was not at all keen on being mixed up with the dirty business—so I agreed. Mellon said he'd do his best—and that was that."

I listened as if to a man talking to me in a dream.

"Fantastic!" I said. "It sounds like raving lunacy. I tell you, Cantlick, Edderley had nothing more to do with it than I had."

It astonished me that Cantlick, usually so acute, could have been deceived into believing this story.

"All right," he said. "Let it go at that. Only if I were Edderley I'd keep particularly far out of sight."

"We can't let it go at that," said I, testily. "You've got to be more explicit, Cantlick. How do you know anything about it? You didn't see the shot fired."

"No, but I heard it—and under circumstances that left no doubt. Look here, Allison, I may as well tell you the whole yarn. The first thing was that Miss Darley couldn't come down to din-

ner—had a bad head. So we were only six. Bardolph sat at the head and Mellon at the foot, Lord Iscaster and I on one side of the table and Edderley and Colonel Darley on the other. There was a general idea that Lord Iscaster would say something about the engagement of his daughter to Bardolph and that Bardolph would say something about settlements. But, you know how it was—everything going wrong with the Anglo-Iberian, old Iscaster worried to death, Bardolph on tenterhooks, myself curious, the Colonel and Edderley hostile.

"The footman had just brought port when Mellon was called to the telephone. Bardolph sat drumming his fingers on the table, waiting for Mellon to come back. When he did and spoke to Bardolph privately, I saw Edderley get up and walk over to the center window, go behind the curtain, and pass out. I thought it curious. Then Bardolph, who was greatly disturbed by this telephone message, asked us to go along to the billiard-room, and he would come to us there. He had business with Mellon which must be done. As I got up from my chair I saw the window curtain of the end window parted a little and Edderley's hand on it, but he did not come through.

"We went to the billiard-room. Iscaster stayed behind a moment for a word with Bardolph, but joined us just as a footman was getting drinks. The old man was fuming. Colonel Darley said to me: 'Where's Edderley?' I said that he had gone through the window on to the terrace. We

were there for a few moments—it may have been a minute or two—when we heard a shot from the dining-room. It was, in fact, a very loud explosion, and could have been heard a long way off, I should think. We all rushed out into the corridor, but Mellon came flying along looking like a ghost, and pushed us back into the billiard-room. 'For God's sake,' said he, 'let the servants find it and tell us.' Which they did. You know how Bardolph was found—with a gun in his hand. A tall footman saw him first and cried out that Mr. Bardolph had shot himself. The butler came running to the billiard-room saying also that Mr. Bardolph had shot himself. For a time we believed that Bardolph had shot himself.

"When we got back to the billiard-room again after going to see him, Mellon locked the door.

" 'You have not seen Major Edderley?' he asked us generally. Nobody had. 'I wish he were here so that all the party could testify that Mr. Bardolph shot himself,' said Mellon. Colonel Darley was the first to see that something was wrong.

" 'You have something to tell us, Mr. Mellon?' he said. Then it all came out. Mellon's telephone message had been from one of Bardolph's runners in London, giving the news of Miss Darley's marriage to Edderley. Bardolph was first knocked end-wise. Then he said: 'That fellow Edderley—he's here! He's eaten at my table.' And he went red in the face. He put his hand in his hip-pocket and pulled out a little pis-

tol, which Mellon said he always carried. Mellon cried out to him to put it away, and Bardolph shouted: 'Where's that —— ?' And that instant Edderley stepped in from behind the curtain with a mask over his eyes and a gun in his hand and stood at the end of the room. 'Here he is,' he said. And then they both fired—and you know the rest. Edderley went out as he had come in. Mellon saw that Bardolph was dead, and ran along to us. That's how it happened, Allison, and that's why, after our pow-wow, we decided to do what we did. Unless you think Mellon's a liar, and shot Bardolph himself. . . ."

"No," said I, "I don't think Mellon's a liar, and I'm sure he did not shoot Bardolph. But I'm just as sure that if you asked Mellon at this moment he would tell you that Edderley had nothing to do with the shooting."

## Chapter Five

It was past one when we left Woodbury, and I was tired with that long day, which began in the train somewhere between Bordeaux and Paris and was now ending in a motor-car on the English roads. The talk with Cantlick gradually faded out. In spite of the excitement of the adventure and the possibilities of the next few hours, we both fell asleep. Fenstock said afterwards that he had stopped to tip two spare cans of petrol into the tank without awaking us.

But I was fully roused long before we reached Goole. Though Fenstock had driven hard, it was then half-past nine. A quarter of an hour later, Fenstock said:

"This is where we turn off, sir."

A road forked to the left. Fifty yards along it a car stood. Wilby looked round when he heard our engine and waved his hand. We drew up alongside him.

"She's discovered!" said I. "Hurry!"

"D'you mean to say—?"

"Just that," I told him. "Not a minute to lose."

"Oh, kick me!" cried Wilby. "They went along here in a big car five minutes ago. I thought it queer. Four of them: boggled at the corner.

Saw me standing here, but wouldn't ask a question. Just looked—then went on and chanced it. Go on, Fenstock," he finished; "you know the place. Drive like the devil."

Fenstock liked no sort of driving better. Wilby toiled along behind him. But when we arrived at the village of Sulby, the damage had been done.

The old lady whose cottage we invaded was flustered beyond measure when first one car and then another pulled up at her door. The whole village stood on the sidewalks to commentate the phenomenon. As soon as I had jumped down I knew we were too late. Miss Mellon had gone. A chauffeur called for her with a car, and she left with him. How long ago? It might be a quarter of an hour.

"You couldn't stop her, of course, Nanny?" Wilby asked the frightened old lady. "But what did she say?"

Miss Mellon had said nothing particular. She had kissed Nanny and said she would never forget her, and would certainly see her again—

"Yes," Wilby interrupted, "but if she didn't say anything, what did the others say?"

It seemed there were no others—only the chauffeur. The chauffeur had asked for Miss Mellon and said he had a note for her. She came out and took the note, and read it, and put it in the breast of her frock—

"Ah," said Wilby. "And then?"

And then she rushed upstairs and put a few

things in a bag, and came down, and told Nanny she had to go now, and kissed her, and said—

"Which way did the car go?" Wilby broke in.

"Out on the Castleford road," said Nanny.

"Not back towards Goole? You're sure?"

Nanny was quite sure. And she was also certain that it was not more than a quarter of an hour ago.

"You see what it means?" said Wilby to me. I thought I did. The note was a blind. It might have purported to come from Wilby or from me —I hoped from me, considering the way she had disposed of the unworthy thing. The chauffeur was a blind. The others would be waiting for her somewhere on the road.

"And the road," said Wilby, "leads to Liverpool! I'll bet a thousand pounds the road leads to Liverpool."

I thought very likely Wilby was right; Cantlick also.

"What about it?" asked Wilby. "Are we all on?"

I was. Cantlick was. Wilby was. He had to let his wife and his office know. He gave that commission to the old lady. She was to get somebody to telephone to his manager at the office in Hull to tell Margaret he would not be home to lunch. And then—on the way!

"Won't it be better—" Cantlick began slowly. We stared impatiently at a man who could be deliberate at this moment.

"Won't it be better to try to delay them some-

where? Five minutes on the telephone, you know—"

"You mean, get the police somewhere to try to stop them?" said I, doubtfully.

"Exactly."

"But we don't want the police in this, do we, Wilby?"

Wilby considered for a moment, then said he didn't see why not. Pierce's anxiety to get hold of Miss Mellon arose only from his greater anxiety to get hold of her brother. On the whole, he thought it a bright idea.

Wilby himself was well-known in Yorkshire. He agreed to talk to the police at Castleford. We waited in the village post office while he got through. The police made a little difficulty about stopping a car unless a charge were preferred against the driver. Wilby turned to tell me this objection.

"Why not make a charge? Say we have reason to suppose that a young lady is being abducted," said I.

That fetched the Police Inspector. Wilby rang off with a smile of triumph. He ran his own car into the garage of the inn and joined us in mine. Fenstock drove to Castleford at a breakneck pace.

Unfortunately, though Cantlick had been clever and the police had been clever, the persons who had taken off Miss Mellon were cleverer. The Inspector, knowing that it would be difficult to detect a car in the town, had sent a

man out on a motor-bicycle to a point that it must pass on the Goole road. The policeman had been clever, too. He had pretended to be a speed trap, and when a big car justifying Wilby's description came along he held it up, demanded to see the driver's license, and took his number. The driver was in chauffeur's uniform. The only other occupant of the car was a young lady, who sat in the back seat. Her conduct was normal. She bore not the least resemblance to a young lady suffering an abduction. Indeed, she seemed rather surprised and annoyed at being held up, and remarked that she did not think the car was going dangerously fast.

We looked blankly at each other.

There had been no mistake, the constable said. No other car of the sort had passed the point.

"Could we have the number of the car?" Wilby asked.

The Inspector saw no objection. It was a London registration—an "X" number. Wilby wrote it down. We thanked the police for their help, and returned gloomily to the street.

"Plain enough," said Wilby. "We're asses—at least, I'm an ass! The real people are making themselves scarce for fear of rousing her suspicions. They've fed her up with the note, and she's blissfully anticipating a meeting with you, Allison. Nothing for it but going on, I think? But once having been held up by the police, they'll begin to think, and do a bit of dodging."

"Liverpool's a nasty problem," said Cantlick,

thoughtfully. "Unless there should happen to be a boat sailing for America to-day."

"There is," said Wilby. "The *Morganatic*—at three this afternoon."

"Then I think our objective should be the landing stage in the shortest possible time. A motor-car in the West Riding is a needle in a haystack: a girl on the gangway of a liner can be recognized."

## Chapter Six

It was a plunge into the blue to make straight for Liverpool on this hypothesis; but it seemed the only thing to do. We started at once. Fenstock, the imperturbable, said: "Very good, sir," when I told him the next stop would be Liverpool landing stage.

Wilby was invaluable. It appeared that his "composition" was an important item in the Yellow Star company's annual accounts, and that his name was well known at the offices of the company. We reached Liverpool at two o'clock, and he made Fenstock pull up in James Street. If the tricksters who had deceived Miss Mellon were to be passengers by the *Morganatic,* he said, their number was certainly up.

He took Cantlick and myself into the offices, sent his card to a certain manager with a word or two scribbled on it, and within a minute we were shown into the manager's room. He introduced us, and told our business: we had cause to suppose that an attempt would be made to smuggle a young lady against her will on to the *Morganatic*—or at any rate to get her there by false pretenses, that it amounted to an abduction, and that if it came off there would be a pretty scandal later on.

The manager raised his eyebrows and said it was a weird yarn. He was, however, impressed by Wilby's seriousness.

"Most of the passengers are on board by this time," said he.

"But this one certainly isn't," said Wilby.

The manager excused himself and went to a silent telephone-box. When he returned, he said:

"There are no more than a dozen passengers yet to be accounted for. The only lady among them is an invalid. An ambulance litter is waiting to take her from her car to the ship."

"Ah!" cried Wilby and I in the same instant.

"Look here, Jackson," Wilby said, "will you do me a great kindness? Keep that litter waiting till we can get down to the landing stage?"

"What!—you don't think—"

"No time to think," said Wilby.

"Ah, but I have to. What you ask is an extraordinary thing—I can't do it without more certainty. Tell you what, Wilby," looking at his watch, "I'll go down with you—if that'll do?"

Wilby jumped up.

"Come along, then, Jackson. Squeeze into our car. You don't mind?"

We bundled out at the landing stage. Every obstacle that might have detained us vanished on the appearance of Mr. Jackson. We arrived at the foot of the gangway between the *Morganatic* and the shore. There was much running up and down by porters and officials, but, as the manager had said, most of the passengers had gone

on board. Many leaned over the rails, waving and attempting to make themselves heard by their friends in the crowds behind the ropes.

Mr. Jackson spoke to a steward, who shook his head. He repeated the signal to us. We breathed more freely.

In the clearing around the foot of the gangway, Jackson greeted a tall man who had his back turned to us, and walked with him through the gangway into the ship.

"Phew!" he said, when he rejoined us, "I'm glad to have got him on board out of the way if there's to be any fuss. That's John K. Pillar. He wired for his suite yesterday—going to New York about the Anglo-Iberian affair."

Two men who had been strolling up and down the cleared space passed as Jackson spoke and stared hard at us. They went away towards the passage leading to the street behind the landing stage. Cantlick touched my arm.

"Come on!" he whispered.

"Eh? Where?"

"If you want to be in time, come on, Allison."

I had not the least notion of his meaning, but I followed him to the passage and into the street. The two men who had left the stage stood by a pillar of the elevated railway, looking eastward along the road as if waiting for a taxi. Cantlick stopped, and I stood beside him. Fenstock sat at the wheel of my car ten yards off.

"Got your gun?" he asked in an undertone. "When the car comes up, dash round to the off-

side and hold up the chauffeur. Leave the rest to me. Don't talk. They're watching us."

Cantlick was not the man to go suddenly mad. But this episode seemed perfectly Bedlamite. I stood by his side, dumb. Thus we waited a good five minutes. Sounds of imminent departure came from the landing stage—whistles, the rattling of cranes, a deep note from the *Morganatic's* hooter. Another five minutes. Trains roared past on the elevated railway. Lorries crashed on the cobbles of the street. People passed in and out. Still the two men stood there.

"Now, look out!" whispered Cantlick.

A car came tearing down the road. Its number plate with the initial "X" was enough for me. I felt for my revolver. The two men rushed to the edge of the pavement opposite the passage to the landing stage. I stepped into the roadway. The car drew up between us.

The next twenty seconds were almost beyond my small talent for description.

I flung open the driver's door, and said to him:

"If you move a finger, you're a dead man!"

"Good God, sir!" said he. "What's up?"

It was almost comic. Expecting to find a kidnaper, I had discovered a startled chauffeur.

As he spoke, a scuffling noise came from the other side of the car. I heard Cantlick cry:

"Hands up!"

Then people rushed from every side—drivers stopped their lorries and jumped down, stewards and a policeman ran through the passage, and in

a few seconds the car was surrounded by a mass of struggling people, all crying: "What's up?"

However much the chauffeur might have wanted to move the car, it was absolutely impossible now. I squeezed my way past him to the near-side and on to the pavement just as Cantlick, with the aid of the policeman, had pushed back the crowd and got the rear door of the car open.

There, huddled up in the corner of the seat and unconscious, was Miss Mellon.

The policeman proved to be a man of common sense. Seeing that Cantlick was somehow concerned in the matter, he pulled him into the car, and closed the door. I was being shouldered away when Cantlick looked out and saw me.

"Better go and tell Wilby," he shouted.

I forced myself through the crowd and onto the landing stage. I was not allowed to pass the ropes, but I saw Wilby and Mr. Jackson close to the gangway. Mr. Jackson glanced anxiously towards the entrance and looked at his watch.

"Wilby!" I yelled. "It's all right."

All three of them turned at the sound of my voice. Wilby came towards me. Mr. Jackson gave a signal. The gangway was run out-board onto the stage. Wilby joined me, and Mr. Jackson followed him.

## Chapter Seven

WHEN we got into the street, all the disturbance had declined. The lorries were on the move again, the crowd had thinned out to a few of the casual curious. One of them volunteered that it was only a woman in a faint, and they were going to take her to hospital. The policeman had again proved his common sense.

When, in a state of high excitement, Wilby and I burst in upon him, he gave a third demonstration of his quality.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "there's no need to be excited. The young lady's all right. She'll come round in an hour or two."

"Dope," said Cantlick.

"Yes," said the officer, "I smelt it at once. These young ladies will—it's very sad."

I perceived that Cantlick had been making suggestions to him. Cantlick was also displaying his common sense.

"I've told the officer we were expecting her," said he, "and I've proposed that we should drive her to the hotel. If he wants to make any further inquiries he can come along, or send somebody round. Is that right, officer?"

"What hotel, sir?"

"Shall we go to the 'North Western'?" said

Wilby. "Ah, here's Jackson. Look here, Jackson, the young lady is in a faint, and we're going to take her to the 'North Western.' We'll ring you up later, eh?"

"What about—?" Jackson began.

"Oh," said Cantlick, "they're gone."

Mr. Jackson had intimations of common sense also, aided by a wink which Cantlick conveyed to him. The officer, impressed by Mr. Jackson's presence and complaisance, came to the conclusion that he could safely leave the matter in our hands. We arranged that Cantlick and Wilby should take Miss Mellon in the car as she was and I should follow with Fenstock.

I looked—and Fenstock was not there; no car was in sight. In the confusion of those minutes, I had clean forgotten him.

"What the deuce!" I cried.

"Never mind," said Cantlick. "Leave a message with the policeman that if your car comes up he's to send it to the 'North Western.' Give him the number. Come along."

"But what can have become of Fenstock?" I persisted.

"I've a notion," Cantlick said. "But it doesn't matter now. Let's attend to the girl."

The people at the hotel were very good. We made up a story for them. They got a nurse. We handed Miss Mellon over to her and told her the truth—that we believed she had been purposely or accidentally doped. She bent down to the sleeping girl's face.

"Bhang," she said, "and a strong dose. She won't be long coming round, but she'll be pretty ill afterwards."

We asked her to do everything that could be done. Then we ordered food which we all badly needed, and set to waiting and talking.

"It was a near thing, Allison," said Cantlick to me. "Touch-and-go whether Miss Mellon arrived at the North Western Hotel or at some very different place."

"I suppose so," said I, "but even now I can't see through it, Cantlick. If we hadn't held up the car, I suppose she would have been carried on board the *Morganatic*—or, at any rate, they'd have tried to get her on board."

"I think the supposition wrong," he answered. "If we had waited on the landing stage for her, we might have waited till now. However, we needn't speculate much on a point we shall soon be able to see beyond doubt. Did you notice that Jackson was very anxious that John K. Pillar shouldn't see any disturbance?"

"Yes," said Wilby. "Jackson told me Pillar had wired for a suite at the last moment—sudden call to New York on business. They only just managed it for him. Extraordinary how everybody kowtows to a millionaire."

"Nauseating," said I. "But I'm not interested in Pillar, or any other money-bags. I want to know what Cantlick has in his mind about those two fellows. Why wouldn't they have taken Miss

Mellon on board? The whole plot was perfect —stretcher and all."

"Because they had the office," said Cantlick. "They overheard Jackson talking about a disturbance—and they made for the entrance at once. Personally, I think they'd had the office before. You said there were four men in the car you saw, Wilby. Could you identify them?"

"Couldn't see into the back of the car," said Wilby. "Impossible to recognize anybody. I just formed the impression that there were four men."

"Well, I'm certain two were the beauties we diddled at the landing stage; who was the third remains to be seen; the fourth was probably the chauffeur—apparently some innocent fellow they'd taken on for the job."

"By Jove!" I started up. "What about him? We've forgotten the chauffeur, and let him go!"

"Oh, no, we haven't," said Cantlick. "I saw to that while you were attending to the girl. He's waiting outside—and the policeman at the station entrance has instructions not to let him leave without my permission."

Wilby and I looked crestfallen as Cantlick smiled at us. Then we could laugh, too.

"Excusable for Allison," said Wilby. "He was picture-gazing, eh, Allison? But as for me, I ought to be sacked. Only, of course, I didn't even guess as much as you knew."

"All's well," said Cantlick. "I suggest we get a private room and have the fellow up. Allison

will be able to turn him inside out with a bit of cross-examination."

But when we did get the chauffeur into a private room, we found that there was nothing inside him to turn out. The man was simply a chauffeur. He owned his own car and a little garage at Goole. He had been engaged that morning for the day by a tall dark-haired gentleman with two companions. He was first to drive them to Sulby, where another car was to meet them. A mile or two from Sulby they overtook this car and stopped. The three men got out. The tall gentleman gave him a note to deliver to the young lady in Sulby. She would put on her things and join the car when she had read the note. He was then to drive straight to the landing stage at Liverpool, where the three gents would meet him. He must be there by half-past two. They had some business to do in Leeds on the way, but theirs was a fast car and it would probably reach Liverpool first. They handed to him a lunch-basket, which he was to give to the young lady about one o'clock so that she need not go hungry on a long drive. She would probably say nothing to him, but if she did ask questions he was to tell her that Mr. Allison and Mr. Wilby would explain it all when they arrived at Liverpool.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Wilby.

"'Twasn't bad, was it?" Cantlick remarked.

It all went off according to program, the chauffeur said. The young lady read the note, got

on her hat and coat, and brought a bag to the car. She could hardly get rid of the old woman quick enough, and the car could hardly travel fast enough for her; and when a perishin' bobby held them up just out of Castleford, she got real angry. He didn't know the roads west of Leeds, and he had to take the big towns, or else he would not have been so long on the way. As it was, he was nearly half an hour late. And as for the rest, well—we knew all about that.

"But we don't," said I. "You've left out the most important thing. The young lady had been drugged on the road. Who drugged her?"

If he was to die the next minute the chauffeur could not tell us unless she drugged herself. He had not stopped anywhere except in traffic blocks in Manchester. Nobody entered the car. The young lady was all right when he spoke to her last, and that was when he gave her the luncheon-basket just outside Manchester. After that, being late, he had been so intent on his job that he did not look round more than once. Then he thought she was dozing in the corner of the car.

"Wilby," said I, "would you mind going down and getting the luncheon-basket? I suppose it's still there, driver?"

"I s'pose so, sir," he replied, as Wilby went out.

"Had nothing yourself?" Cantlick asked him.

"No—not till just now, I sent a nipper into the station for a sandwich."

"And you give us your word as a Yorkshire-

man that you never saw these fellows before and knew nothing about the dirty business?"

"Not a thing, sir. I think they comed up by train from London, for they called in at my garridge about nine o'clock. I was meaning to have a day going over the car. So I put a stiff price on the job. He paid up on the spot before starting, and said something about a good tip at the end of the journey."

Wilby came in with a luncheon-basket—quite the conventional affair.

"Most of it was on the floor," he said. "But I've picked up what I could."

We gathered round the table to look at the remains of a meal which had been hardly touched —packets of sandwiches, cakes, and chocolates. The significant piece was a small bottle with the label of a well-known white wine on it. The bottle was empty, or nearly so. Much of its contents had been spilled into the basket. It was sodden.

Cantlick bent down and sniffed, and then invited us to follow suit.

## Chapter Eight

THE cause of Miss Mellon's anesthesia could not be doubted. The wine she had taken was heavily drugged.

Cantlick was evidently a little suspicious of the chauffeur, but he gave us sufficient assurances of his ignorance that any plot was toward. Cantlick pointed out that his car had a London registration. He replied that he had bought it second-hand, and he produced his own driving license giving his name and address at Goole. We had to dismiss him from our calculations.

We sent him off with the warning that he might be called upon at any time to tell his story elsewhere, and went to our belated luncheon.

I had eaten hardly half the amount of food demanded by a wolfish appetite when a message was brought from the nurse that the young lady had come round and was asking for a Mr. Allison or a Mr. Wilby. The nurse said it would be better, perhaps, if she saw only one person at present.

I looked at Wilby. He sent me back a knowing smile.

"You go, Allison," said he.

She was sitting up on a bed loaded with blankets when I entered the room. She looked horribly ill—pale, disheveled, wretched. But I flat-

tered myself that she brightened a little at sight of me.

"Oh, Mr. Allison!" she said. "I've been so bad. And what does it all mean? Why am I here? The nurse says this is the North Western Hotel at Liverpool. . . ."

"And the last thing you remember is that you sat in a motor-car somewhere in the neighborhood of Manchester and drank some wine that had been kindly added to your luncheon."

"Yes—I remember that. And seeming to fall off to sleep—and then nothing. I had your note. I expected to meet you. What made me ill?"

"It's a long story, Miss Mellon," said I. I looked towards the nurse. "Perhaps you're not strong enough to stand it now?"

But the nurse said there was no reason why we should not talk. It would do the patient good to be kept awake and interested.

"Well, then," said I, "perhaps it will throw most light on the matter for you if I tell you at once that I never sent a note."

"What!" she cried. And, "Oh—oh!"

And she tore from the bosom of her dress an envelope, crunched it up, and threw it away. I picked it up from the floor.

"May I read this?" I asked. She supposed I might. I smoothed out the sheet of notepaper that the envelope contained, and read:

DEAR MISS MELLON,—Wilby and I think it will be good for you to leave Sulby at once, as there seem to be chances of your discovery by you know whom, and it is

particularly dangerous now in view of your brother's position. The bearer has a car and has been employed to enable you to join us if you will come with him. We have given him some luncheon for you. This afternoon we will discuss a new place of safety.

Yours sincerely,
SAMUEL ALLISON.

"I say, you know, Miss Mellon, this is neither my handwriting nor my style—at least, I hope it isn't," said I.

"You forget I don't know your handwriting and have never seen your style. . . . Why—we've only met once before!" she cried, as though making a strange discovery. And it really did seem a strange discovery to me.

"Why, so we have," I replied, "or so it appears. But I think it must be a mistake. I've known you quite a long while, really—been thinking about you for years."

"Oh!" said Miss Mellon. "You aren't going to flirt with me, are you? If so, I'd better send you off while I make myself look a little less like a fish-hawker after a debauch. . . ."

"Now, I'm quite certain that's not your style," said I. "That's just camouflage, isn't it? I'm not going to flirt with you. I'm going to tell you a very strange and serious story."

"Well, can't I come downstairs and hear it? I feel heaps better now. Is Mr. Wilby here?" I nodded. "How curious, if you really didn't send me that note, that both you and he should be here!"

The whole strangeness of it was unfolded to her in a disorderly and discursive way by the three of us when she joined us in our room and had displayed her surprise and pleasure at meeting Cantlick again.

"You had a narrow squeak, Miss Mellon," said Wilby at the finish. "If it hadn't been for Allison here and his friend Cantlick, well . . ."

A look of puzzlement in her eyes as we told of the scene on the landing stage gave way to a look of horror.

"This man—what is he like?" she asked.

I could only repeat what the chauffeur had said—that he was a tall, dark-haired man.

She shuddered.

"Well, Miss Mellon," said I, "anyhow, whatever his motive, Balter will not trouble you any more. He's learned that your friends are a bit keener than he is."

"Oh, I hope so," she answered, "I do hope so. If not—Arnold, my brother—"

How it happened that Miss Mellon's feminine doubts proved sounder than our masculine certainty appeared within five minutes, when a message came that Fenstock was outside asking if he could see me.

"Good old Fenstock!" said Cantlick. "I thought it wouldn't be long before he turned up. Will you have him brought in here, Allison?"

Fenstock was ushered up. He touched his forelock to Miss Mellon and came nearer to a

smile than I had ever seen his impassive countenance approach.

"What took you off, and where, Fenstock?" I asked him.

"I hope I did right, sir," he said. "But if not, I couldn't help it. I had to do it or burst."

We all stared hard at him.

"While I was waiting for you outside the landing stage, sir, I sees a very fine car just along the street and I walks up and has a look at it. 'Twas a Rolls. I was coming back past the entrance when the two gents comes out. One of 'em says: 'Where's the car?' And the other points down the road to where the Rolls was standing out of sight. Then you and Mr. Cantlick comes out. You didn't see me. I was strolling around under the railway—watching the traffic. I sees the other car drive up, and you know what happens then. The two gents gets away from the crowd and runs for the car. I was just passing it then, and I dodges in under the viaduct where it was standing and when the gents gets there they finds one of the back tires down."

"Oh, Fenstock!" said Wilby.

"Very good, sir," said Fenstock. "If I done wrong—"

"My dear Fenstock, nobody's accusing you. Go on."

"Well, sir, I calculates that you might be glad to know something about those gents, and a Rolls is easier to keep in sight with a flat tire, and if

they had to change the wheel, it would give me time to get the old bus warmed up. I sees you all busy with the young lady, so when the Rolls goes off bumping a back rim on the cobbles, I slides off after him. He stops a few yards down to pick up the other gent—"

"What other?" we all cried.

"The one that comes bolting off the landing stage after you and Mr. Wilby. You didn't see him, I expect, being so otherwise occupied."

"What was he like?"

Fenstock said he was a tall, dark-looking chap.

Miss Mellon jumped up.

"Balter! I knew it! I felt it!" she exclaimed. "Arnold . . . think of Arnold, Mr. Allison!"

"I'm thinking hard," said I. "Depend on it, he'll be all right."

I caught her hand and tried to calm her.

"Well—go on, Fenstock," I said. "Cut it short. Where did they go? You followed, of course?"

Yes, Fenstock had unostentatiously followed. It was not a long journey—about two hundred yards, he should think. Then they stopped, and the first two gents got out and looked at the flat back tire, and used some pretty language about it. Anyhow, it was language that made the drayman look envious. They set about changing the wheel. Jacked up the car. Pulled off the wheel, unmounted the spare, and put it on. They weren't used to the job and took a long time.

Then they wound down the jack—and down went the big car on another flat tire. It was a coincidence that the spare was punctured as well.

"Oh, Fenstock!" said Wilby.

This time, Fenstock passed on without noticing the interruption.

They ran the car on the rim to a garage which the policeman showed them how to get at, and had both punctures mended. Then they drove through the town to the North Western Hotel.

"What! Here?" we all shouted.

"Yes," said Fenstock, "here." It was a pity he had to go back to the landing stage to ask where the young lady had been taken so that he might find us. But it was all right. The Rolls was standing outside in the station yard, and the American gent and his two friends were starting at 5 o'clock.

Cantlick caught the look I exchanged with Miss Mellon.

"It's a quarter to five now," he said. "I wonder where the car's going?"

"If you'll excuse me, sir," said Fenstock, "I think the car's going to Woodbury. The two gents was in the hall as I came up, and I heard one say that it was about an 'undred and eighty miles to Reigate, and they needn't go through London."

# Chapter Nine

We had a complicated issue to discuss and settle, and about a quarter of an hour for the purpose.

In my mind no doubt remained now as to the truth about the Bardolph affair. That had emerged clearly enough from the whirling events of the past few days. I thought probably Wilby and Cantlick had reached the same conclusion, though we had not spoken of it. The duty before us was plain. But for the moment I dismissed it.

The first thing I would do, whether it was duty or not, was to see to the safety and comfort of Adelaide Mellon. It would be difficult. She cared nothing now for her own safety. She could think of nobody but her brother.

While I looked at her and pitied the anxiety in her eyes, the idea came to me that we might be able to combine a move which would put her and her brother out of danger and at the same time clear up the Bardolph mess in the only definite way, by knocking the mask off the face of the man who killed Bardolph.

The first suggestion I made was that Miss Mellon should return to Yorkshire with Wilby. I knew she would reject it, and she did. I then

said I supposed Wilby would have to go back anyhow, and he replied that rather than go back without seeing the end of the adventure he would never go back at all.

"Then," I said, "we all go south together. But how? Fenstock can't be asked to drive another two hundred miles to-day."

But Fenstock was deeply shocked by the suggestion that anybody but he should drive us.

"You know what it means?" I asked him.

"I think so, sir. We've got to be in Woodbury before the Rolls."

"Yes. Can we?"

"I'd eat my cap if we couldn't," said Fenstock.

"Well, you others," said I, "this is how I lay it out. Say if you disagree. The two 'gents' have had instructions to do certain things in Woodbury Manor Woods to-night. When they get there, they will be received by two likely fellows, who will know how to deal with them. We could leave it at that, of course."

"What else?" asked Cantlick.

"I've an idea . . . Miss Mellon, if you could get your hat and coat on now? Fenstock, go with Miss Mellon, and don't leave her till you find the nurse, and then wait for her."

She hesitated a little at this dismissal from the conference, but I pleaded with my eyes, and she went out with Fenstock.

"Couldn't say this before her. But here's my idea," I went on. "That we should set a trap.

I'll wire to Mellon through Mr. Burch to resume his place in the cottage by ten o'clock, and give instructions to have the tall lackey moved out of harm's way. I'll also wire to Mr. Pierce to have some men at my house by ten o'clock and to wait for us. If Mr. Pierce can overhear the interview, don't you think he's likely to get some useful information?"

"You mean Mellon to pretend he's been there all the time?" asked Cantlick.

"Yes. Who's to know?"

"It's a brain-storm!" cried Wilby. "But there may be a rough house. What are you going to do with Miss Mellon? She oughtn't to know anything about it."

"I shall leave her with Mrs. Batting and say we are going to see her brother, and, if it's safe, to bring him back with us. Agreed? Then you fellows go and get some food to take in the car, and tell Fenstock to get hold of same spare cans of petrol. I'll draft the telegrams. We'll start before five."

While I was writing the messages, Miss Mellon came into the room hurriedly, alone. She turned to lock the door, and as I looked up in astonishment I saw her white and trembling. I jumped up, crying:

"Adelaide! What is it?"

This was the second time I had seen the girl, and I called her by her Christian name. It burst out without consciousness on my part—I had been thinking of her as Adelaide—until I saw her

startled look and a momentary flush in her cheeks. But she took no other notice of the indiscretion.

"Forgive me," she said. "I had a fright—I suppose I feel the effects of—this afternoon."

She looked at the locked door as if for comfort.

"That man—I met him on the staircase. He passed without speaking. There were other people about. But the look in his eyes! He makes me feel afraid, Mr. Allison."

"I told Fenstock to wait for you," said I.

"Yes—it was very thoughtful. And Fenstock's a dear. He was close behind me at the time, and only left me in this corridor; Mr. Wilby wanted him about some petrol. It isn't that I'm afraid here, really. But the terrible look in his eyes—!"

I took her hand and held it—a little unnecessarily, perhaps. She made no protest.

"Never fear," said I, going to the door and unlocking it. "There's Cantlick and Wilby about, to say nothing of me—and I'm sure Fenstock would sell his soul for you."

"You're all so good to me. I can't ever thank you, Mr. Allison."

"Oh, yes, you can, some day," I told her. And then Wilby and Cantlick came in and said all was ready. I finished writing the two telegrams, added one to Mrs. Batting, and handed them in at the office in the hall as we passed out.

Fenstock sat at the wheel of the car, and as I came down the steps nodded his head towards the yard where a big Rolls stood. I made Miss

Mellon take the seat beside Fenstock. The three of us stuffed ourselves into the back, and Fenstock began his second wild drive in the twenty-four hours. It ended at my house in Woodbury on the stroke of half-past ten.

# Chapter Ten

THE Rolls had not passed us on the way; indeed, nothing had passed us. We felt certain that whatever road it had taken, we were in Woodbury first. I had told Mrs. Batting that Mr. Pierce might visit me that night; she was to put him in the drawing-room (which, it will be remembered, I never used); and that I should require her to look after a lady for the night. So that when we arrived there was no collision and no difficulty. I did not want Pierce to meet Miss Mellon yet. We told her, to her great contentment, that we were going to see her brother and to bring him back with us if it seemed safe. Then Mrs. Batting carried her off, and a few minutes afterwards brought Pierce to my study.

Cantlick and Wilby and I had agreed among ourselves that the theory we had in mind and had hardly formulated in words to each other was too serious to put forward without absolute proof. Therefore, after Pierce had been humorous at the expense of the new corps of amateur detectives, and finally asked us to put all our cards down face upwards, I said:

"We haven't any cards to show, Mr. Pierce. But on the off-chance that you may get a real clew we decided to ask you to come down and witness and hear, if possible, a meeting which we

have reason to think will take place between two people to-night. This is Mr. Wilby and this Mr. Cantlick—"

"Good Lord!" cried Pierce. "I should think —but never mind; we can talk about that after. Now, what's the meeting, and where?"

I told him it was a hypothesis we had worked out from facts we knew. When he heard of the meeting-place and the means of seeing and hearing, he exploded merriment—said it reminded him of his schooldays. Nevertheless, he looked keenly enough from one to the other of us.

"You've put the State to great expense, Mr. Allison," he said. "I thought at least we were up against a little army, from what you said, so I brought down quite a posse of men."

"How many?" I asked.

"One. I'm the other half of the posse myself."

"You don't take us seriously, Mr. Pierce," said I. "There are three of us, and we can take my driver. That makes six. It won't be one too many if what I expect to happen does come off. You'll be dealing with rather fierce people with no particular conventions about law and order."

"If you're nervous," said Pierce, "we can call on Foker and his constable."

"I'd rather not. If it's a fiasco, the fewer who know about it the better."

"Very well. What time?"

"Probably half-past eleven, but we'll go right on now, if you're ready."

In one sense what happened in Woodbury Manor Wood that night was a fiasco. In another a tragedy. Perhaps if Mr. Pierce had taken us seriously, or if he had known the things that we suspected, he might have had a success. But, first, he had no faith in our percipience, and next, when that was placed beyond doubt, he was so taken aback by what he saw and heard that his own mind seemed paralyzed until it was too late.

We had not misjudged the destination and intention of the three men from Liverpool, and we were not far out in the time of their arrival. Fenstock led the way to the wood and into the drive. We spread out among the trees on each side to avoid the possibility of being seen if the visitors should by chance have got in before us. But when we came to the gamekeeper's lodge it was dark and quiet. If any of Mr. Burch's handy men were in the neighborhood, they kept themselves well out of sight. Pierce prospected the ground and spread out his available force into what he called a cordon. As there were only four men—Wilby, Cantlick, Fenstock, and his own assistant—it was a thin line, but he thought it would do. In fact, Mr. Pierce was rather scornful and more than a little skeptical about the whole performance. After the event, I believe, he blamed me for not telling him more beforehand about the grounds on which our hypothesis was built up. But I did not blame myself. If I had told him that Mellon was in the

hut, he would probably have gone for Mellon and spoiled everything.

I left him for a moment to steal round to the door. The key had been left on the outside according to my instructions; therefore Mellon had returned. I resolved then to take Mr. Pierce into my confidence.

"There is a man in the cottage," said I. "It is Arnold Mellon. The interview I expect to take place is between him and another person, and if it comes off I don't think much doubt will be left about the truth of the Bardolph affair."

"So you say," answered Mr. Pierce, still skeptical. "I suppose you're hand-in-glove with Mellon. I'll give him this amount of rope, but you mustn't think—"

"Sh!—sh!"

Fenstock had crept up beside me. From the back of the house he had heard the distant noise of a car in the road, and its sudden cessation. He whispered this and stole back. I felt the tingling of a great excitement as we waited for three figures to come into view around the corner of the building. . . .

Only two came. One had probably been left with the car to keep open a line of retreat in emergency. So much the better. If it came to a "rough house," as Wilby put it, there would be one less to deal with.

They stopped in the middle of the avenue and looked at the house, talking in murmurs; then went to the door. We heard an exclamation of

surprise at the discovery of the key, followed by more words too low to reach us. They turned to look up the avenue, evidently for the tall footman. Finally the key was turned and they entered the cottage.

Pierce touched my arm. We tiptoed across to the window. I pointed to Fenstock's auger-hole and he crouched down, to peep first and then to listen. I, standing against the wall by his side, could hear nothing, but I was sure that, if Mellon had grasped the meaning of my telegram, what Pierce heard would astonish him. It was too dark to see the expression on his face, but he gave a little gasping breath now and then.

In my state of tense feeling, I had no measurement of time. The conversation on the other side of the wall might have lasted five minutes or an hour—I could not have said which. Pierce told me afterwards that the two men were in the room altogether fifteen minutes.

At the end of whatever time it was, suddenly and without warning, Pierce straightened up and made one jump to the door just as it opened and a man came out.

Pierce caught him skillfully round the neck, with an arm over his mouth, so that he could not call out, and grabbed for his right arm but missed it. That miss ruined his plan. The capture so far had been made without a sound, for the footsteps of both were deadened by the turf. But in the instant when Pierce failed to catch the man's hand he contrived to get it into his pocket and fire

a shot without waiting to pull his revolver out.

The explosion in that deadly silence sounded like an earthquake. Our cordon of watchers closed in, running across the drive. But before they were halfway to the door the second man dashed out of the house. He jerked his head from side to side, saw Pierce struggling with his companion and Fenstock and Wilby within half a dozen yards of him. Then he ran, turning to the left past me as Pierce shouted:

"Watch him!"

I flung out my foot and the runner stumbled over it but did not fall. He ran on round the corner of the house; I tore after him, and somebody else came panting behind me. The wood was now full of cries.

The fugitive made off among the trees, and might have got clear if Fenstock, who was next behind me, had not thought of his torch and suddenly sent a beam after him. That settled his fate, but it also undid me. He was twenty yards ahead of us in the thin fringes of the wood. As the light picked him up, he stopped deliberately, and shot at the light—he could have seen nothing else.

I saw a flash, felt a terrific whack on my shoulder, which knocked me down. I struck my head against something hard, saw a million stars—

And that, for me, was the end of the rough house.

# Chapter Eleven

SOMEHOW or other, I had got back into my own bedroom. It was very dark, but I knew it was my own bedroom. Somebody said: "Touch and go."

Then I went to sleep and dreamed pain—just sheer pain—for a long, indefinable time. I did not exactly feel pain, but I dreamed it. I had not imagined there was so much pain.

I was back in my bedroom once more, still in the dark. Somebody said:

"Do you think so?"

And somebody else replied:

"Well, yes, I hope so."

Upon which I slept for a still longer time, because now, in the absence of pain, I went motoring for days and nights on end, and traveling in trains for endless weeks, sometimes with Fenstock, and sometimes with Edderley and his wife, who had a habit of converting themselves suddenly into Mellon and his sister, which was highly disconcerting. Occasionally I spent whole nights in forests watching the flashes of electric torches and hearing the firing of pistols.

I came back to my own bedroom one day, and heard somebody say:

"Quite healed. He'll be all right as soon as he gets over that bit of concush."

Somebody else said in a voice that I liked:

"Let me stay with him now. You go and lie down."

The voices had seemed far off, but they were coming closer when they suddenly ceased altogether, and I actually heard the door closed.

As there were no more sounds, I was about to go off again, on a steamer this time with a little man in a bowler hat and another little dark man in the uniform of a Portuguese gendarme. But I came back to my bedroom, and I felt a hand lightly passed over my hair. I liked that; it seemed so friendly in the strange phantasmal world I inhabited. And then I felt something else, still more pleasant—and so very unusual that I could hardly remember when it had happened last. It was a soft cheek laid against mine, and then a pair of lips that kissed it.

So very unusual that I made an enormous effort and raised my eyelids to see the head that was on the pillow beside me. There was no head on the pillow, but beside the bed, her eyes moist and her face blazing red, Adelaide Mellon stood.

"Oh!" she said. "Thank God!"

I smiled at her, but it was awful exertion even to smile.

"Hush!" said she. "I'll fetch the nurse."

And she almost ran out of the room.

Concussion of the brain plays curious pranks with a man. I had been in my bedroom three weeks, I learned next day. The shot through my

shoulder was quite a neat job from the surgeon's point of view. He said it was a beautiful wound. But I never knew anything about it. My head was the trouble. Even two days after I came back to consciousness, everything was very confused, and I mixed people up. Only one thing seemed absolutely clear and convincing, and that was that somebody thought it worth while to kiss me. I found that a stimulating idea: if it was true it might be worth while to make an attempt to live. Otherwise I did not care much.

On a certain day, Fenstock was introduced by the nurse. He stood at attention beside the bed.

"Do you think you could?" she asked him.

"It's a pretty bad one, Miss. But I've done worse in the Army."

Then between them they propped me up on pillows, and the nurse said:

"Fenstock's going to shave you, Mr. Allison. You'll feel more comfortable."

It seemed a ridiculous idea. I always shaved myself. But I remembered that I had not recently shaved myself, and I put a hand up to my face. It was almost lacerated by contact with a hedgehog's armor about three-quarters of an inch long. I was horrified.

"Bring me the glass, Fenstock," said I.

I looked upon the unrecognizable countenance of a thing with a bristly hedge of black and gray hair sticking out all over it. I could almost have wept. That kiss must have been a delusive

dream, like the steamer and the gendarme. No woman could have kissed a face like that.

"Very well, Fenstock," I said with a sigh. "Carry on."

"Very good, sir," said Fenstock.

Fenstock had not boasted vainly. It was a bad one. But he removed it. With scissors first. Then with razors. Caressingly he went over it till the face beneath showed, and then polished it with a fresh-stropped razor, and bathed it and powdered it.

He stepped back with his head on one side to view the result of his artistry.

"If you could stand it, sir," said he. "Your hair's a bit long: I might take off a little."

"Carry on, Fenstock. Make me look like a human being."

"Very good, sir," said Fenstock.

When he had done with me and brought the glass, the dreadful thing had gone and I saw a sort of white-faced ghost of myself with deep-sunken eyes and angular cheek-bones.

"I'd like to say, sir," Fenstock remarked, standing on one leg, "that this is a happy day."

I caught Fenstock's hand and shook it.

"Fenstock," I said, "between ourselves, I thought a day or two ago I saw Miss Mellon for a moment. Probably I dreamed it."

"I should say not, sir. Very likely it was true. The young lady has been here ever since. From things she has said to me, I think she has been very anxious about you."

"And she's—"

"Here now? Yes, sir. It was the young lady that asked me whether I ever did any shaving while I was in the Army."

"What's the time, Fenstock?"

"It's half-past three, sir."

"Anybody else here besides Miss Mellon?"

"No, sir. Mr. Cantlick was here yesterday. You saw him."

"Yes—I think I did. And Mr. Wilby, too."

"Mr. Cantlick had to go to London to-day, and home to Byfleet this evening. He said something about telling the good news to your god-daughter. Mr. Wilby had been hanging on till you were out of danger, and he went home last night. Mr. Mellon, he's been up and down to London. He said yesterday he was going to tell Mr. Pierce you were getting better—because Mr. Pierce wanted to see you as soon as you could be talked to."

I listened almost indifferently to this catalogue of personages. It was mixed up with the Bardolph affair, of course; but that seemed strangely remote and uninteresting.

"There's something else, sir. Mr. Edderley and his wife are back in London, and they're coming to see you soon."

I puzzled over this. Edderley was accused and in hiding—but I suppose Pierce had been persuaded of his innocence. Anyhow, this did not interest me now.

"Fenstock," I said, "there seem to be only Miss Mellon and the nurse in the house."

"Yes, sir, at present."

"Don't you think the nurse must want a little fresh air this afternoon?"

"I should think it very likely, sir."

"You could take her for a drive—a good long one."

"Yes, sir," said Fenstock.

"And you might tell Miss Mellon that you've shaved me."

Five minutes after he had gone, the nurse brought me some slops to drink. I took them down obediently.

"It's a fine afternoon, nurse," said I. "Won't you let Fenstock take you out in the car?"

She said it was very good of me to suggest it: if I was quite sure that I should be all right alone. I assured her that I should not be at all lonely, and she smiled. And I smiled.

In fact, I was not lonely. Adelaide came into the room, more lovely than my first vision of her. She clapped her hands, and said:

"Oh, splendid! Fenstock is a wonderful barber."

I began puzzling again about that dream. And all the afternoon, while she sat by my side, talking bright nonsense and insisting that I should not talk at all, I puzzled. It seemed such a miraculous thing, if it could possibly be true.

But then, Adelaide Mellon was herself a mir-

acle. I even lost some of the pearls of humor and sagacity that fell from her lips in watching the lips themselves, and glancing past them to those gray eyes which had achieved me in the first instant they looked into mine. I envied the sunbeam that came through the window and played with her hair. Only in the room where she sat huddled up in blankets had I seen her hair before: then it was all tousled and bedraggled. Now it was a kind of halo which reflected the lightness of the wanton sun. Her slim figure, boyish like Miss Darley's and most of the girls of the time, was draped somehow—I think with a sort of jersey or jumper in white. My only misgiving about the miracle was as to its age. It looked so tender and fresh a miracle that I doubted the twenty-five years I had given it in my mind, and thought of the horrible spectacle I had seen in the glass an hour before; and the landscape darkened.

"Oh, how glum you look!" she cried. "What have I said?"

The concern in her voice brightened up the scene instantly.

"I just recalled a dream, that's all," I replied. "You've dissipated it. It's all right. One has dreams when one is ill."

"Ah, yes—and generally horrid dreams."

"This one was particularly beautiful," said I.

"Then—why did you frown over it like that?" She looked at me, I thought, with a little suspicion.

"Only because it was too beautiful to believe. Old fellows like me have no business with beautiful dreams."

She got up and walked to the window to look out over my garden.

"I did not think you particularly venerable," she said, with her back towards me. "Perhaps I've been too frivolous."

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed, and then fatuously went on: "You couldn't be too anything—only just right."

She seemed to find the view over the garden interesting, for she looked steadily at it as she said:

"It's rather too bad of you—to—to chaff me. One can't answer a sick man back."

The accents of her low voice and the little hesitating catch in it were extremely trying. But I had resolved not to make love to her now. I would wait till the terms were equal. I remained silent. She stood there a minute or two, then came back to her chair.

"You know, Mr. Allison, I shouldn't have thought of you as old. How old are you? Sixty?"

She had quite recovered her composure.

"Nearly," said I. "I shall be sixty in about twenty-five years. And time passes so quickly. I feel as if I have one foot in the grave already."

She laughed—and that was the greatest of all the miracles, like an infinitely lovely cadence on some supernatural instrument of music.

"Poor old thing!" she said. "I shall never be able to catch you up. I'm ten years behind you."

So she was, incredibly, twenty-five! My spirits rose.

"Ten years is a yawning chasm," I remarked.

"I should have thought it so, if I had thought about it at all," said Miss Mellon, "till now. But not now. Four weeks is the real yawning chasm. You know, Mr. Allison, we've really had an awful time with you. It seemed like four centuries before you condescended to let us know whether you were going to—"

I filled up the pause, inanely enough:

"Yes—it was most inconsiderate of me. If I had only known, I wouldn't have done it."

She turned her head away again.

"There!" she ejaculated. "The doctor said you weren't to be talked to about that—and I've broken the rules."

"Never mind. Go on. Smash them. They're made to be broken. The only good rules are those you make yourself."

"No, I mustn't. But I did want to say something if you wouldn't try to discuss it."

"If you make a rule, I abide by it," said I. "Say on, Miss Mellon."

"It was just this—that neither Arnold nor I can ever thank you or repay you for what you did for both of us. It's overwhelming. And then—the end of it, the terrible end of it: how can you forgive us for dragging you into the wretched business and causing you nearly to lose your life?

—No, please! Don't say anything. I can't bear it."

And incontinently she got up and hurried out of the room. I did not see her again that day. I had to be content with the nurse and her slops. But in the evening the doctor came. I never needed a doctor, and I knew this young man only slightly. He said I was "progressing favorably," and as long as I did not overtire myself I might both talk and listen to talk, and he would give permission for Mr. Pierce and Mr. Mellon, who both wanted to see me, to come to-morrow.

# Chapter Twelve

THAT to-morrow brought the last phase of the Bardolph affair.

Pierce came down from London in the morning and brought Mellon with him. The policeman was as cool and ironical as ever. Mellon displayed a warmth of which I had hardly thought him capable.

"My dear sir," said he, "how fine to see you like this! It was touch-and-go for so long."

"Nasty crack," said Pierce. "It all comes of amateurs trying to do police work. But we forget that Mr. Allison has heard nothing about what happened—unless Miss Mellon has told him."

"Miss Mellon wouldn't discuss anything with me—'doctor's orders,' she said. And I didn't want her to. The great thing is that she and her brother are both safe. None the less, I begin to feel a little curious about the way it ended. I suppose you didn't get him?"

"Get whom?" asked Pierce.

"Why, Balter."

"You haven't even heard that? You know nothing that happened since you were knocked out? Why—we'd better go through the yarn from beginning to end, Mr. Mellon, eh? Won't you tell him the preliminaries?"

"All right—just as you like."

So Mellon started the joint narrative that was to clear up all the dark spots left in my mind.

He began with Vera Cruz, his father, oil schemes, and Jim Balter.

"I can save you a lot of trouble," said I. "Your sister, when Cantlick sent her to me for advice, told Wilby and myself all about that in order to explain why Balter was persecuting her."

"Are you sure she told you all of it? I don't think she could have done, Allison—simply because she didn't know it herself."

I stared at him.

"Well, you know—there are things you don't tell, even to your sister. One of the things I didn't tell her was why I came to England to join Bardolph."

"Oh!" said I.

"There might have been accidents—awkward accidents. She was better out of it. In the last year I was at Vera Cruz—the year when Balter went to jail and my father died—I learned to hate two men more than any human being was ever hated before. At least, I think so. The two men were James Balter and Edward Bentinck, a pair of assorted scoundrels such as you only meet in a place like that. They had a wildcat oil scheme, and they drew my father into it. Balter was the man in the limelight. Bentinck stayed behind the scenes to play the part of the mysterious financier. I dare say Adelaide told you how Balter deceived my father into lending

himself as an engineer to this ramp. Good God! When I think of the escape he had of having his name dragged in the mud! I had my suspicions from the first. When that loathsome reptile began to pay his beastly attentions to Adelaide, I got busy about his antecedents, and came across Bentinck. As soon as Bentinck felt that there was danger, he blew the gaff on his partner. You know what justice is out there. Bentinck kept the right side of its representatives, and disappeared as soon as Balter was laid by the heels. But not before he had got the ear of some of the people in the Mexican oil swim—or got at their consciences, which was better—and the next time I came across him he had floated a big oil concern in New York, and was on the way to what he became—Edward Bardolph, the millionaire."

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "And you—"

"I don't know," said Mellon, "whether your particular brand of conscience will condemn me or not. But I hated both these dirty dogs with a perfectly cold and deliberate hatred. I could not get my dead father out of mind, and there was nothing I wouldn't do to punish them. Bardolph, as I'll call him now, came back to England after his first coup in New York, and worked all his schemes from London. You know how the money simply falls around a man who is reputed to be making money. He had friends in Mexico, and he soon had the Mexican market crawling at his feet. Then I made up my mind to come to London. Adelaide I left in New York till I

could be quite sure of bringing off my plan. She knew nothing of Bentinck, either in his own person or as Bardolph. I told her I was going to join the new financial star in London, and I came across. I demanded a job of Bardolph. He didn't like it, but he was afraid to refuse me; I knew too much about him. In a very little while I had coerced him into giving me the highest position in his new Corporation. I knew more about its business than Bardolph himself."

"And then, you—"

"And then, as doubtless you were about to observe, Allison, and then I proceeded to ruin him. I don't know what you think of it. I can't help that. I felt all the time as if I was stamping on a poisonous snake. Now that he's dead—well, I'll not abuse him. He played into my hands like a child. You know, Bardolph was essentially a coward and an ass. His success was a combination of luck and dishonesty. Still, I'll not abuse him."

"You can abuse him as much as you like, Mellon," said I. "*De mortuis* does not, in my code, apply to this kind of creature. Your sister told me something about his notions of honor—"

"Yes, that made me laugh and feel furious at the same time. You know, he actually suggested that I should get Adelaide over. I think his idea was that as he'd stolen Balter's liberty he might as well steal the girl that Balter had honored with his attentions. Well, I went on preparing my vengeance. I commanded plenty of money

now: I could have made money in shiploads. But what I did make I spent on New York, concocting a bombshell to blow up Bardolph with. When this new Mexican magnate, John K. Pillar, began to be talked about, it was quite easy to get in touch with him, and I did. He sent agents to and fro, and we planned a coup. I should not have touched it off so soon but for Bardolph's foul scheme for marrying Miss Darley. Then, when I learned that he had been trying his games on Adelaide as well, that finished it. John K. Pillar beared Anglo-Iberians in New York, and the fun began. It would have been a gorgeous revenge if that tragedy had not taken it out of my hands."

"It's always dangerous to play providence, Mellon," said I. He looked at me strangely.

"Play providence? What d'you mean?"

"There was a man," I replied, "who wrote some anonymous letters to people I know about Anglo-Iberians. I think he was trying to play providence."

Mellon frowned.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "Anyhow, it didn't come off. On the Friday night of the dinner party, when Bardolph was about to make his announcement about Miss Darley and to say how many millions he would settle on her, I meant him to learn that he hadn't any millions at all. It was pretty bad, but not bad enough. The stock had not dropped to the point we intended it should. It was quite on the cards that old

Iscaster would have chanced his arm that night and Bardolph would have bluffed it out."

"What stopped them?" I asked.

"You know if genius is the art of catching the skirts of chance, your friend Edderley is a genius. He stopped it by marrying Miss Darley first. The news I expected on the telephone from Pillar did not come; instead, a message came through for Lord Iscaster from his house that a clergyman of his acquaintance had called to congratulate him on the marriage of his daughter to Major Edderley. I suppose clergymen do gossip among themselves. At any rate, that was that. Almost as I got back to the dining-room, Edderley rose from the table, saying it was very hot, and, excusing himself, went to the window and stepped out on the terrace, as for a breath of air.

"You can imagine me whispering the news to Bardolph, Bardolph sending his other guests to the billiard-room, detaining Lord Iscaster for a moment while I gave him the message, Iscaster turning purple as though he were going to have a fit, Bardolph sending him after the rest and saying he would follow.

"Bardolph was at the limit. He went almost insane with rage, seemed suddenly to remember that Edderley was at his table a moment before, pulled a revolver out of his hip pocket—he was never without one, as I told you—and cried out, 'Where is that —— ?' And just as he spoke Edderley came in at the third window with what I took to be a black handkerchief over his eyes—

but it really wasn't—and a gun in his hand, and said, 'Here he is!' Instantly there was a double shot. Edderley stood looking for two seconds at Bardolph, who was knocked against his high-backed chair by the shot and bounced forward with his head on the table. Then Edderley went out at the window again."

"Only," said I, "it wasn't Edderley."

"No, but I didn't know it at the time. I thought it was. And I acted accordingly. I think Cantlick has told you the rest of what happened that evening."

I nodded.

"And you know all about the day of the funeral."

"No, I don't, Mellon. I don't know what happened to you."

"Of course not. I forgot. What happened to me was kidnaping."

# Chapter Thirteen

"BALTER got hold of you—of course, I understand that; but why and how?" I asked Mellon. "It's all plain up to a point, and then it becomes worse than a crossword puzzle. Balter wanted your sister. Both of you detested him. At the time when Balter barged into her life again you were down here, and Cantlick sent her to me for help. Balter traced her to Woodbury and probably to my house, put on a watch, had me followed, and Wilby—and in the end found your sister at Sulby. But why you should be locked up in a gamekeeper's hut and threatened with an accusation of murder, and what part the tall footman played in the game, I can't see. How does Balter get mixed up in the Bardolph case?"

Mr. Pierce intervened between Mellon and his answer.

"Don't you think, Mr. Mellon," said he, "we might show Mr. Allison Balter's photograph, and ask him if he has ever seen the man?"

"I thought of it," said Mellon, "but judged it might be a bit of a shock to him."

"Oh, I expect Mr. Allison is used to this kind of thing. It's not a nice photograph, but he'll be prepared for that."

And Pierce drew out of his pocket-book an official-looking print stuck on a sheet of paper with a typed legend on it. He handed it to me.

As he had said, it was not a pleasant photograph. It was the picture of a dead man. He lay with closed eyes and pallid face on a stretcher. I had a quiver of astonishment as I looked upon the square features, their sharp lines accentuated by death.

"Why!" I exclaimed, "this was the man that Wilby and I met on the golf course!"

It was their turn to be astonished. They stared at me and together asked: "When?"

"The morning before the funeral," said I, and told them how the tall fellow had stolen upon our conversation as we were talking about Mellon's reconstruction of the scene in the dining-room, and how we had been fearful and doubtful as to what he had overheard. Mellon listened with wide-open eyes.

"No doubt about how much he had overheard," he said when I had finished the story. "That's the one missing link, I think, Pierce?"

"Looks like it," said Mr. Pierce.

"You see, Allison, I had been quite convinced that Edderley was the man who shot at Bardolph. The upper part of his face was concealed, but he was clean-shaven, he was in evening clothes, he was about Edderley's height, Edderley had gone out at the window, and the masked man came in at the window. Bardolph had just called Edderley by a foul name, and was

there with a gun in his hand. Was it not a natural inference of mine?"

"Perhaps," said I. "You did not know Edderley well."

"No. But if I had known him intimately I should still have thought he did a natural and a praiseworthy thing in shooting Bardolph. If you have got a fair idea of my state of mind on the subject, you'll understand my impatience with Wilby and you that Sunday afternoon. It was highly undesirable that, when we had succeeded in establishing the theory of suicide, anybody should come nosing around the dining-room as Wilby did that day—and as Pierce did afterwards when he found the hole in the book-back that Bardolph's bullet had made. . . . By Jove, Allison! You and Wilby had me on tenterhooks that day. I saw everything Wilby did: it was all reflected in the windowpane. I knew you were Edderley's friend—and yet—"

I steered Mellon back to his story. "About the missing link?" I asked.

"The one thing neither Pierce nor I have been able to understand is why Balter, when he came to see me, gave himself away. But for Balter himself, nobody would have known a thing. And we could not understand why he confessed to me in the second minute after I saw him."

"Confessed what?"

"Why, that he was the man who came in through the dining-room window and shot Bardolph."

I had been guessing it for the last half-hour. None the less, it came like a sudden light.

"He'd never have given it away unless he had been sure I had recognized him—and what made him think I had was your talk of Mellon's reconstruction. He must have heard just enough to mislead him."

"Still, there's something I can't understand," said I. "Why didn't you hand him over to the police that day and avoid all the trouble that's happened since?"

"Because—unwittingly, mind you, Allison—I had been hand in glove with him for several months, and I wanted a little time to turn round and think. And before I could act on my thought, Balter had done the trick: I was trussed and silenced."

"Hand in glove with him?" I cried.

"I think," said Mr. Pierce, "we had better show Mr. Allison another photograph and ask him if he recognizes it."

From the pocket-book this time he drew a newspaper cutting. This contained a portrait of the man who, in the Scotland Yard picture, lay dead on the stretcher, and under it were the words:

"Mr. John K. Pillar, the international financier, who has come to the rescue of the Anglo-Iberian."

I laid down the cutting on the table, and gazed confusedly at Mellon.

"You—knew?"

"No!" said Mellon, almost fiercely. "Good God, of course I did not know! I had never seen Pillar. I had not the shadow of an idea that the new financial genius in Wall Street was nothing but the old sneak-thief of Vera Cruz, until the hour or two before the funeral. Then he came piling claims upon me. He claimed friendship and partnership in the spoils that were to be got out of the ruin of Bardolph. He thought I knew what he had done on the Friday night, and approved of it. He even claimed Adelaide. He laughed when I cursed him. He thought threats to hand him over to the police were a joke. But after the funeral I contrived to make my position clear to him."

"What was that?"

"He was to go to America and leave Adelaide alone and never cross my path again."

"Compounding a felony," said I.

"I don't know anything about the law. Mr. Pierce says the same. But, having acted with him for the ruin of Bardolph, what could I do? However, he didn't accept. As soon as he saw that I was in earnest, he turned vicious. It was only then that I learned he had a spy in Bardolph's household—the footman, Evans, one of his own toughs sent over from the other side about three months ago. Balter rang the bell—we had been talking in the dining-room—and turned the tables on me.

" 'You were in this room, Evans,' said he, 'on

Friday night when Bentinck was shot. I was here, too. Who else?'

"'Mellon,' said the footman.

"'Did you shoot Bentinck?'

"'No,' said the footman.

"'Did I?' asked Balter.

"No, you didn't,' said the footman.

"'Well,' said Balter, 'there was only one other man in the room, so he must have shot Bentinck. I find him guilty, and I leave him with you to deal with, Sheriff Evans, till I decide whether you shall put the English police wise or not.'

"Then Balter covered me with his revolver, and the footman grabbed and gagged me before I could even yell. Then they had a long discussion about me. Evans mentioned the empty cottage in the Manor Woods, and Balter told him to keep me there for the night. In fact, I was taken as far as the nearest gate in Balter's own motor-car. Lord knows what might have happened in the next day or two if it hadn't been for the lucky chance that you sent Adelaide away and he had the mistaken notion that I knew all about it. That made him keep me there—alive."

"D'you think—?" I began.

"Well—I knew my Balter. He wasn't taking any risks for the sake of my beautiful eyes, that's certain."

"What made Balter decide to kill Bardolph at that special moment, Mellon?"

"Nothing. He didn't decide. He didn't want to kill Bardolph. He had heard from Evans

about the dinner-party. He thought that if Bardolph could announce a marriage between himself and Miss Darley the scheme for Bardolph's ruin might go astray: you never know how these things will take the public. He came down to prospect. He intended to appear as an unexpected visitor on business—Mr. John K. Pillar, come to talk over affairs with Mr. Edward Bardolph, unaware that he had guests. He was all dressed up for the character of John K. Pillar—full evening rig and squash hat and black cape. He told me himself that if Bardolph did not fall dead of apoplexy when he recognized him, and if he still went on with the marriage scheme, he meant to denounce him to Lord Iscaster as an impostor and a shady speculator masquerading in a false name. But he was quite sure Bardolph would get cold feet as soon as he appeared. He literally rolled himself in his muddy scheme of vengeance. And it would have been lovely to see the two rogues confronting each other with their past!"

Mellon seemed almost to sigh over the scene that failed.

"It was Edderley's elopement that upset the scheme. Balter came down in his car, timing his arrival for nine. He was a little early. Evans, on the look-out for him, told him dinner was not quite over. He strolled around to the terrace and stood looking into the room. He saw me come from the telephone and speak to Bardolph. He saw the guests leave. He saw Bardolph take

out his gun and heard him cry out: 'Where is the —— ?' And he thought the message I had whispered to Bardolph was a discovery of himself."

"Ah!—I see," said I.

"In a sort of bravado, he pulled out his own revolver, stepped through the window, shading his eyes with the crush hat, and said: 'Here he is.' And then it all happened."

Mellon got up and paced my room and lit a cigarette.

"You know, it's a beastly shame that you've been lugged into the sordid business, Allison," said he.

"My dear chap," I replied, "you don't know what you're talking about. It's the finest thing ever. *Kismet.*"

He looked at me queerly.

"Well, let's hope so," he said. "Now, Pierce, hadn't you better tell him what happened after Balter put him to sleep?"

"Oh, that's nothing much," Mr. Pierce answered. "I don't care to—well, to dwell on it, because it was my fault. I bungled my job with the fellow that came out of the cottage first. That gave Balter his chance. You know, these thugs who infest America, shooting and defying the law, aren't so very clever. Mr. Mellon utterly deceived Balter that night. You'd told him in your telegram to keep his visitor as long as possible and to make him talk, as somebody

would be listening. Do you know, he got him to rehearse the whole thing?"

"How?" I asked.

"Oh, playing around with the idea that if Balter really meant to put suspicion upon him he might prevail upon his sister to save his reputation and his life by listening to Balter. It was very neat; no lawyer could have done it better. Mr. Mellon described the thing as it was and asked Balter how he could possibly make it otherwise. His companion was going to look for Evans to add his persuasions when the show burst up. When you dropped, Mr. Allison, Fenstock stopped to look after you, and my man and Mr. Cantlick and Mr. Wilby went on with the chase. Balter fired once more, but hit nobody. He had a volley from the other three, aiming at his flash—and which of them killed him, fortunately, we shan't ever know. He was dead when they got up to him."

"And that's the end of the second wizard of finance," I observed. "A very fitting end, don't you think, Mr. Pierce—to be shot like a wolf in his tracks?"

"I never think," said Mr. Pierce.

"The fact is, Allison," said Mellon, "this doesn't bear too much thinking about. If you press hard with your mind on it, the whole thing will cave in. We had another inquest, and the cold perspiration breaks out on Mr. Pierce's brow whenever he thinks of it."

Mr. Pierce nodded emphatic assent to this.

"Here," said Mellon, "was the old argument all over again. Should we drag in you, and Edderley, and his wife, and Lord Iscaster, and rake over the whole unsavory yarn—and create a greater sensation than ever by holding an inquest on John K. Pillar? Or should we hold an inquest on a certain James Balter, whom I could identify as an old acquaintance in Mexico, and who confessed in my hearing and Mr. Pierce's that he had killed Mr. Bardolph, against whom he had a personal quarrel, in a sort of lightning duel unseen by anybody, and that in attempting to escape arrest he was shot dead by the police? The second story kept you out of it and everybody else, and it put an end to the hue and cry for Edderley. You had an accident. That was all. So we risked it. And it came off. You can read the papers when you're well, if you want to."

"It was a noble idea," said I. "But I don't quite see how John K. Pillar has been accounted for."

"He hasn't. He's a mystery of the sea. He sailed from Liverpool a month ago in the *Morganatic* for New York, and when the ship got out to sea he was reported missing—supposed to have fallen overboard. The news was in the papers next morning."

"That was before anything came out about the death of Balter?"

"Yes, of course."

"What splendid joss!" I said.

"Wasn't it? There was a divinity that shaped our very rough-hewn ends! But, as a matter of fact, Allison, the report of Pillar's disappearance first suggested to us that we might risk having the inquest on Jim Balter instead."

"And Balter's accomplices?"

"Only too glad to be allowed to get out of the country."

"And the pseudo-footman?"

"Fenstock's choice fellows from Godalming had given him such a grueling that we had to send him to hospital. But he, too, is out of England by this time."

## Chapter Fourteen

We talked till lunch-time, when the nurse came to clear them out. And at intervals in the next few days I discussed the thing with people who were in it—Fenstock, Cantlick, and Mellon—again and again. But at greatest length with Edderley, since he was a chief actor in the plot and knew less of its development than anybody else.

He came down from London with his wife immediately he heard I was well enough to be seen. I had by that time obtained permission to descend to my den, and there Katherine Edderley and Adelaide Mellon became known to each other.

It was a grievous thing to have to stop the flow of eloquent gratitude from another charming woman as I had already had to stop Adelaide's; but I burst out:

"If anybody starts thanking me for anything, I shall go *berserk!*"

The Edderleys had a pleasant holiday at the Villa Almeida. Nothing happened. Nobody came. They were not molested. Not a soul in the world save myself ever had an inkling of their presence at Cascaës. Senhora Almeida alone kept them up to the proper pitch of excitement

for fugitives by imagining treasons and stratagems, and seeing spies and agents behind every clump of cactus and in the bowl of every fountain in her rococo garden. She sent her salutations to me with an expression of disappointment that my enemies had not been more enterprising.

Lord Iscaster and Colonel Darley, Katherine told me, had returned to London, her father a little chastened by a fortnight in bed in a Devonshire cottage where his doctor sometimes sent him for a rest-cure; Colonel Darley in the seventh heaven because of the marriage of his perfect niece to his whilom perfect subaltern. Edderley, still in rapt contemplation of the never-ending beauties of his bride, listened to her chatter with almost fatuous pride, I thought.

Cantlick came upon us all with a very big surprise: just as Fenstock was helping the maid to bring in the tea, he arrived accompanied by Miss Mischief, who had insisted that if Uncle Allison was now quite well she should be taken to see him.

All this combined to work up a spirit of domesticity, a familiar air most foreign to this den, formerly sacred to paper and ink, tobacco and masculinity. Miss Mischief, having been given a ride and allowed to do my hair and inspect my watch and explore a drawer of my table, began to take an interest in the two ladies, and before Cantlick carried her off to Byfleet she had created

a great and new sensation in the house as of the sudden incursion of its rightful owner to appraise its custodians.

Some of this feeling remained when the Edderleys had gone and I was left with Miss Mellon beside the ruins of tea.

I rang to have the table cleared, poked up the fire, pushed my long chair round to it, and said to Miss Mellon:

"Won't you sit there? That's your place, you know."

"I know?"

"Where you sat the first time you came. Do you like the room?"

"I love it."

"It's a dangerous room," said I.

"How, dangerous?"

"Miss Katherine Darley came here and loved it—and, hey presto! she suddenly elopes and becomes Mrs. Edderley."

"Well, there's no danger of my doing that," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because—well, I suppose bigamy is not done in the best circles, is it?"

"Certainly not," said I, "but I'm not married."

I was not really afraid to look at her because I knew now as confidently as when I saw her first that this young woman was for me; but I did not look. And she did not speak in reply.

"Besides," said I, "if you think eloping is

rather overdone, why, I ask you, elope? There's a church quite handy. Now, if you really do like this room, we'll agree to leave it as it is, because I'm used to it. But if you'll gut and revolutionize and transmogrify every other square foot of the house, I shall be greatly obliged. You can have a new car if you wish, but I should like to keep Fenstock. I want three hours in the morning to immortalize my fatuous thoughts on things in general. The rest of the twenty-four hours I am your abject slave. I think that's all. Adelaide, what about it?"

She did not answer, and I turned towards her to see her gaze fixed on the fire and her head drooping.

"Adelaide," I said, "I wonder if you can possibly know what's the matter with me? I beg your pardon for making such a speech. It's only camouflage. I think you know. I loved you two seconds after I had seen you—and I've been speculating ever since whether you could possibly ever feel any love for a superannuated relic like me. Now, when I saw you there looking like the angel of the hearth, I had to put it to the touch. It's wonderful to love you, Adelaide, and I'm grateful to you for existing, because I never loved any woman till now. You're such a delicate thing that I'm almost afraid to speak warmly for fear of scorching you. But if—"

She reached out a hand to me. Then I had her in my arms.

"A day or two ago," I said, "I had a dream. Do you think you could make it come true?"

She made it come true. And to ease the strain of an emotional situation that wonderful young woman remarked:

"Fenstock really is a good barber, isn't he?"

THE END